

BETTER BUSINESS LETTERS

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BETTER BUSINESS BOOKS

BETTER
BUSINESS LETTERS

BETTER
BUSINESS ENGLISH

BETTER ADVERTISING

By

JOHN M. MANLY

Head of the Department of English, The University of Chicago

and

JOHN A. POWELL

The Holtzer-Cabot Electric Company, Chicago

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BETTER BUSINESS LETTERS

A Practical Desk Manual Arranged for Ready
Reference, with Illustrative Examples of
Sales Letters, Follow-Up, Complaint,
and Collection Letters

BY

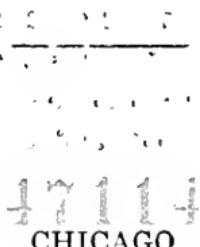
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P R E F A C E

If one were to attempt to put into practice all the rules and suggestions that have been printed on the subject of business letters, the letters produced would, it must be admitted, be stiff and ponderous. They would resemble the weighty "essay" of half a century ago, rather than a present-day sales talk. Certainly this would be true if it were regarded as necessary to embody in each letter all the rules laid down regarding "opening," "description," "argument," "proof," "persuasion," "clinchings," and the various intermediate embellishments.

Most books on the subject of business letters devote far more space to these features than does the present work. The authors believe it is wiser to give to the subject a treatment that is suggestive rather than one that is exhaustive and likely also to be exhausting.

This book is designed, not as a textbook on the subject of business letters, but as a practical aid to the man who is trying to train himself to break away from the stiff and commonplace office letter that is "natural" to him only because it has become habitual. It is designed to serve him as a manual for desk use, to which he can turn, at the moment of dictation, for a suggestion or a rule applicable to the class of letter he is about to write. A work that is to serve such a purpose must not be "long winded" or full of abstract discussion of theoretical rules. It must, on the contrary, be simple and brief in its treatment of the rules, and at the same

PREFACE

time not so crowded with examples as to suggest the use of any one of them as a model for a concrete case.

The one thing above all others that the book seeks to emphasize is that business letters should be business talks in writing, with the "human" element predominating. If the ability to write letters of this sort is recognized as the first thing to be striven for, the reader will appreciate better the proportionate weight which should be accorded to the more technical elements. Attention, interest, desire, decision, are the emotions that must necessarily be awakened in the mind of the prospect before a sale can be effected. Technically speaking, this is accomplished only through description, argument, proof, persuasion, and a "clinching" close. Yet there is often no sharp or clear division between these processes. No two letter-writers accord the same weight, or devote the same amount of space, to any one of these elements; and the same writer will, in different sales letters, lay greater stress on one element in today's sales letters than he did in those of yesterday.

After all, it is human nature to vary in one's own mental outlook from day to day. Being human in one's letters includes, then, a necessary variation in surface expression—and this is the very thing to be desired. It means freedom from conventional phrases; it means being one's self.

If, therefore, the rules laid down in this book are treated as a framework on which must be hung the personal wardrobe, so to speak, of the writer of letters, the object of the authors will have been attained.

THE AUTHORS.

Chicago, 1921.

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BETTER BUSINESS LETTERS

CHAPTER I

THE ATMOSPHERE OF BUSINESS LETTERS

Why persons who can write an absorbingly interesting or witty social letter, and whose family letters are full of naturalness and "human interest," cannot do the same with their business letters is one of the questions that the Sphinx has failed to answer. Many a business man will write to his social acquaintances informal notes which reflect his personality in charmingly attractive ways, and yet, as soon as he sits down to write or dictate a business letter, the same man seems to think it necessary to submerge his personality in formalities and in commonplace phrases which, for some reason or other, are considered businesslike.

The greatest mistake that can be made is to assume that a business letter must be formal, must avoid anything like individuality, and must utilize the old, shop-worn phrases that make the average business communication a dreary imitation of thousands of equally dreary predecessors. A realization of this fact has, in recent years, begun to trickle into the business consciousness, with the result that the brighter minds are breaking away from time-worn phraseology and are making their correspondence a reflection of the personality of the writer—as it ought to be.

We propose to approach gradually and logically to a discussion of how this is to be brought about. We shall consider first some general principles applicable to all business letters of any nature. With the fundamentals clearly in mind, the application of specific principles will be more easily understood.

A business letter should be regarded as substantially a business conversation reduced to writing. It should, of course, be more concise and logical than the ordinary conversation, but the idea to be emphasized is that the ordinary principles underlying and regulating an interview between business men should be regarded as applicable to their written conversations—their letters.

This chapter is primarily devoted to a consideration of the principles applicable to sales letters; yet, in a general way, most of the principles will be found, as we progress, to be applicable to every kind of business correspondence. Some of the other kinds of business letters are discussed in later chapters.

Selling goods by letter is based on the same fundamental methods which govern sales by any other means. The principles which regulate a salesman in approaching his customer, in presenting his proposition, in seeking to close the sale, should be the principles by which the writer of sales letters constructs his written efforts. There are, first, general principles without a knowledge of which no one can be successful in selling, and to these a preliminary consideration must be given.

Those we shall discuss here are: (1) the need of a thorough familiarity with one's subject; (2) the necessity of obtaining as intimate a knowledge as it is possible to acquire of the characteristics, the idiosyncrasies, and the disposition of the person to be addressed; (3) the formulation of a thoroughly well-defined plan of

approach before attempting to frame the sales letter itself. We shall consider each in turn.

1. KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOODS

No salesman worthy of the name—and of the occupation—would attempt to sell goods to a dealer without first learning all there is to know about the goods he wished to sell. He would never consider it enough to know merely the price and quantity discounts. He would know very well that unless he was thoroughly informed regarding the smallest details, such as how his line compared with competing lines, its applicability to various uses and the different classes of prospects, what constituted its leading advantages—*why*, in other words, his line should be preferred to his competitor's—he would not get very far with a critical or unresponsive prospect. The competent salesman knows his goods backward and forward—the details entering into their manufacture, the features that recommend them, in what respects they differ from or are better than every other competing line, and so on to the end of the chapter. The principal motive which impels him to acquire a thorough familiarity with each detail is that he may be able to *interest* his prospective buyers—and to do that he must have a choice of "talking points." One buyer's interest is to be caught by this feature, another's by that feature. And the successful salesman is he who has so complete a knowledge of his subject as to be able to interest *anyone* when talking about it. The average salesman knows so intuitively that success depends largely on this factor, that he needs little argument or emphasis on the fact.

Compare this with the apparent attitude of mind

shown by thousands of sales-letter writers. With what wearying sameness of iteration and reiteration does one encounter letters reading after this fashion:

Your esteemed favor of the 27th at hand. In reply we take pleasure in quoting you prices on _____ as follows _____.

Hoping to receive your valued order, we are, etc.

If a salesman *talked* this way, would he get very far in effecting sales? The remarkable thing about it all is that the very man who dictates such letters will in very many instances *talk* to customers with a true salesman's instinct. He instinctively injects his own personality into the interview; he leads here and there until he has found the "point of contact" with the customer; his sales talk is forceful, interesting, and effective. Why should the written sales talk be wooden and ineffective, when the writer of it is capable of effective and compelling conversation?

There should be no difference in principle between the two cases. That is the point of this discussion. The atmosphere of a letter should be as expressive of the personality of the writer as his conversation itself can be made to be. Imagination is, if anything, more vital in a business letter than it is in conversation. Nevertheless, it must be imagination that is balanced always by facts. And facts cannot be given convincingly unless the writer knows them himself—unless, in addition to the superficialities, he knows the processes of manufacture, or the principles underlying the use, of the goods he has to sell.

Furthermore, the writer of a letter must have a convincing enthusiasm for his subject which is capable of being conveyed to his correspondent through his letter.

It is clear that if the writer lacks a thorough knowledge of the details of his goods, any attempt at enthusiastic description or recommendation will be more or less spurious—somewhere it will sound a false note. Hence, to the degree in which it lacks honesty and genuineness based on *knowledge*, to that degree will it be unconvincing. No matter whether a man is seeking to sell spiritual salvation or mouse-traps, he must first “sell” himself and his product to himself—he must be enthusiastically convinced of the merit of his proposition. He must believe in it, and know why he believes.

This leads us to one of the most important considerations of all, i. e., the importance of truth and frankness.

Aside from all questions of morality, a letter that is palpably frank and honest in its statements impresses the reader as no other kind of letter can. Scrupulous honesty in describing goods offered in a sales letter and entire frankness in replying to a prospective customer’s inquiry are qualities in the atmosphere of sales letters which go a long way toward inspiring confidence and carrying conviction. Untruths, half-truths, evasions, concealment, lack of frankness, are all in the same class, as being both immoral and extremely poor policy.

As a corollary to this, it is to be borne in mind that generalizations should scrupulously be avoided. By this is meant that to describe an article as “the best on the market,” “the most desirable and efficient ever offered,” “the only thing of its kind,” etc., not only probably states an untruth, but also fails to carry conviction, or even to accomplish anything in the way of persuasion. No one is impressed by extravagant claims; and assertions which are simply general in nature—not thoroughly specific in adding something to a definite line of argument or of thought—are mere vapid talk. To one

reading such phrases they suggest a lack of knowledge on the part of the writer, or, worse, a desire to evade the responsibility involved in being specific.

Finally—and this is perhaps the most important detail of all in the atmosphere of a letter—remember that the subject in which the man you are writing to is most interested is *himself* and *his own* interests. Therefore, don't talk about *yourself*, with a tiresome ringing of the changes on what *you* think, what *you* have to offer, what *you* hope or desire, but show your correspondent that you have *his* interests, *his* needs, *his* wishes in mind. In other words, suppress, as far as possible, all references to "I," "we," and inject into your letter all the "you" element possible. The effect of this on the reader is as great as any single feature involved in letter-writing. We shall return to this subject later on.

Our discussion has now brought us to these conclusions:

1. Letters must reflect the *individuality*, the personal characteristics of the writer, in the same manner as if he were carrying on a sales talk with his customer.
2. The writer of a letter must *know his subject* thoroughly, both in order that he may present it convincingly to his correspondent, and that his enthusiasm may be contagious and not open to the suspicion that it is assumed for the occasion.
3. The whole truth and entire frankness constitute beyond all question the wisest business policy, and tend to make even weak letters effective when better written letters, whose frankness is open to suspicion, may fail of the desired effect.

4. Generalizations are always to be avoided. They are either a confession of lack of familiarity with your

goods or they are insulting to the intelligence of your customer. He wants specific facts.

5. The "I" or "we" element is to be kept in the background, and the "you" element (the customer's interest) is to be given prominence. He is but very slightly interested in what *you* think; but it is up to you to show him that *you* are interested in what *he* needs.

2. KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROSPECT

Underlying all successful sales plans, whether these are to be effected by word of mouth or by sales letters, lies the psychological element of the customer's personality. The salesman tries to find some point of *personal* contact with his customer before approaching him. The writer of a letter must do the same. He must not only understand his customer's nature, his needs, his business, his point of view, but must be able to *show* that he does. This personal element tends to win the confidence of the reader where indifference existed before. The lack of it leaves your letter a cold, matter-of-fact, colorless affair, little better in its effect than the typewritten or printed circular.

If this is true, it follows, as was said in the preceding section on "Atmosphere," that instead of talking of himself, the writer must talk of the customer to the customer by discussing the latter's needs or by enlarging on the advantages which are offered to *him*. This can not, of course be done effectively without some knowledge of the customer, whether it be personal, or that gained from mercantile or trade reports, or from psychological inference. A letter showing a sympathetic familiarity with the customer's line of trade and making clear to him the suitability of the goods offered to his particular

situation, will unconsciously create in the customer a recognition of the truth of what is said and an attitude of receptiveness, such as could not be produced by a dozen offers that have nothing of the personal element in them.

In a large business with a large list of customers, such a knowledge of each individual customer must necessarily be more limited than if one were addressing a dozen or twenty of one's acquaintances. The principle is a true one, however, and applies to all classes of cases, namely, that every sales letter should endeavor to strike a personal note that will ring true to the individual to whom it is addressed. In a general way, this can often be accomplished although one possesses no personal information regarding the prospect. The extent of his business can be sized up from mercantile reports; the fact that he is, say, a watchmaker and jeweler, whose class of trade is fairly well defined, will, of itself, suggest a different tone of letter from that to be addressed to a druggist, whose trade comes from a wider class. Or, if the appeal is to be made to private individuals, the classification of the mailing list in advance into lawyers, doctors, preachers, business men, housewives, etc., will suggest a letter varying in the tone and nature of its personal elements for each class. This *adaptation of the appeal to the individual*, whether it is accomplished by a full or by a limited knowledge of the person addressed, is a powerful factor in enabling you to "get under his skin," where the impersonal letter falls on an unresponsive mind and fails to awaken interest, because there is no personal point of contact. As has been wisely said, "It is often easier to get a man to do what he wants to do, than what he ought to do." The applicability of this statement to the letter appealing

You have seen healthy men--among them your own friends--unexpectedly take sick and die within a few days, haven't you?

Have you ever thought that your turn may come--suddenly?

Suppose it did--have you (with the present purchasing value of a dollar at about fifty cents) sufficient Life Insurance to protect your wife and babies as you would wish them protected?

If not, then let us show you our new policy. It protects your loved ones in case of your death. It provides for a monthly pension for yourself after the age of 50, if you should ever need it. And it costs less than many companies charge for ordinary insurance.

It's a special contract, offered only to preferred risks. If you aren't convinced of what it will do for you, when you know all about the plan, you can drop the matter.

The enclosed card will bring full particulars.

Fill it out and mail it today--there's no obligation.

Example of a letter embodying the principle of establishing the "point of contact" with the prospect. Note that it opens with a reference to the prospect himself and his family. The attempt to sell is made after first interesting the reader in something he is assumed to desire.

to a man's self-interest involves a philosophy that is worth embodying in one's practice.

And when you have, by one means or another, obtained the information you need about the personality of your prospect, how shall you make use of it? By the exercise of your imagination, in such a way as will appeal somehow to his self-interest.

If you have reason to believe that the prospect is much like yourself—has the same tastes, interests, prejudices, and difficulties,—your task is easy. You have only to ask yourself, What would attract *me* to these goods? or, What could a salesman say that would get a hearing from *me*? And what would make *me* decide to take them *now*? The answer to these questions—which you yourself can furnish from your own consciousness—is the answer to the problem.

If the prospect is known to belong to a class having entirely different tastes, interests, prejudices, and problems from your own, your problem is more difficult, but still can be solved by the aid of the imagination. Try to imagine how you would feel if you were in your prospect's class, with his experience or outlook on life, and with his interests; and, if possible, assist your imagination by talking with typical persons of his class. Get yourself into his point of view, in other words, and do it by your imagination assisted by what actual experience you can gain. In this respect, it is always greatly to the advantage of the salesman and to the business letter-writer to cultivate a wide and accurate knowledge of men and women of all the classes of society with which he is ever likely to have business dealings.

Without these two qualities, imagination and experience, you cannot successfully visualize your prospect. And without more or less visualization of this sort, your

The Santa Fe men who report to you each week for watch inspection are men who know the value of keeping true time by an alarm clock.

Sixty-five thousand of these men are going to read Big Ben's advertisement in the Santa Fe Employee's Magazine, proof enclosed. They will want to see him, want to own him. Make your store division headquarters for Big Ben. His broad-gauge guarantee of satisfaction and price maintenance gives you a clear track on the profit right-of-way.

Show a railroader Big Ben's splendid construction; have him operate the alarm throttle; tell him that Big Ben will run his home on schedule time, and as a call boy, will not fail to get him out on time for his run. Tell him to bring Big Ben to your roundhouse once in two years for oiling and overhauling.

Investment in Big Ben stock pays handsome dividends and there is no danger of price fluctuations. There's a profit of —— for you on every Big Ben you sell.

In lots of 12 to 24 Big Ben gets free transportation to you. Advertising material is included with an order for one dozen or more.

Big Ben traffic will be heavy this fall, and if you want your share of the business, you should place your order now.

Example of the use of the language of a particular class—railroad men—pushed to the limit. This letter was remarkably successful, and appealed to the spirit of those addressed. It discusses the subject from the standpoint of the *reader*, and is full of the "atmosphere" to which the *reader*, not the writer, is accustomed.

letters cannot have the personal touch which will make them alive and appealing.

3. A WELL-CONSIDERED PLAN

A letter that seeks to effect a sale, to collect a debt, to convey a proposition, is foredoomed to failure, unless it be framed on a plan elaborated and thought out in advance. Such phrases as: "We have no doubt that we can arrange the terms," "We shall be obliged to take further steps unless we receive a remittance," "Let us get together on this proposition, some time," evince a lack of plan in the mind of the writer, an indecision, which communicates itself to the reader—and the point of contact is lost, or rather is never established.

In the preceding section the need of avoiding generalizations was emphasized. What was said there in regard to the atmosphere of a letter applies with equal force to the plan of the letter. If it does not begin, continue, and end with a logically developing and definitely conceived description and offer, together with the requisite selling argument, or with a proposition definite and easy to understand, it violates the rule against "generalizing," and falls far short of the practical and effective.

A letter, again, may attractively describe the goods offered and yet may fail of its purpose, because it stops short of suggesting just how the goods should appeal to the reader—that is, it may lack persuasion, the personal application. Or it may utterly fail to present any special inducement, which may lie in the price, in the terms of payment, in the discounts, in the premium accompanying the offer, or in something else of advantage to the customer.

Or again, a letter may contain all these elements and

may still be ineffective for want of the final "clinching argument," such as that the offer is good for a limited time only, or that it is limited to a certain number, to be sold "while they last," or that the price is shortly to be advanced, or, finally, such as the "Do it now!" suggestion.

Each of these elements will be discussed in detail later. It is sufficient for the present to lay down the principle that the plan of a letter must definitely embrace:

1. A clear proposal, so well defined and so easy of understanding that, in connection with a description of the goods offered, etc., the reader will feel no doubt whatever regarding its applicability to himself. This is to awaken *interest*.

2. The personal element—the persuasiveness which shows the reader why *he* should be interested in your offer, i. e., the advantage of your offer to him personally. This is to awaken *desire*.

3. Some "inducement" which will serve to increase desire and to develop it into decision through the advantage shown to lie in taking quick action. This is to induce *decision*.

4. The "clincher," the telling of the customer what to do so that he will take the final step, sign the order, remit the money, or act today. This is the "Do it now!" suggestion.

CHAPTER II

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SALES LETTER

The writer who has never given much thought to the subject of making his sales letters effective seems usually to entertain a vague impression that imagination is out of place, that stereotyped phraseology is an evidence of business habits, and that his letters should be built on established lines. Woefully wrong as are the first two assumptions, the third is justified in the sense that every letter should embody certain definite elements, which together make up its framework.

We have already seen (pp. 12, 18) how greatly imagination is needed in a business letter, and how ineffective is the ordinary, stereotyped business phraseology. But see also on this subject the list of "Futile Phrases" given at the end of Chapter III.

We have now come to the point of considering how the idea of independence of thought and of language in a business letter is to be reconciled with the statement made above that letters should be built on definite lines, and how personality is to be injected into such letters, as it may be into conversation.

There is a real distinction between following definite lines in the construction of a letter, and using established and timeworn phrases to hang on its framework. Old and seasoned planks may be, and often are, used to sheathe a roof; but weatherworn shingles are not put

on to form the roof. So with timeworn phrases. But the planks which go to form the framework of effective letters must be of at least four kinds. The more skilfully these are made to dovetail, the one with the other, the better, of course. They may be enumerated as follows:

1. An opening that attracts attention.
2. A description that develops interest.
3. Argument and persuasion so well blended as to lead the reader to a decision.
4. "Clinching" that decision with one of the many reasons for urging immediate action—the "Do it now!" closing paragraph.

We shall now consider these in their order:

1. THE OPENING

It will, of course, be understood that there are two kinds of sales letters, (1) those that are written in reply to a previous inquiry originating with the customer, and (2) those sent out as original proposals, with no previous correspondence behind them.

(a) *Replies to Previous Letters of Inquiry.*—In letters of this class it is, of course, necessary to refer at the beginning to the inquiry that is being replied to. On the other hand, such a reference, if made as the opening sentence, may interfere seriously with the attempt to make a striking or attention-creating opening. One way of avoiding this is to place the necessary reference to earlier correspondence outside of the body of the letter itself, so that, like the date line, it is a part of the letter but not in it. There are two common practices by which this may be achieved: (1) by placing it to the right of the sheet, under the date line,

and in a line with the address; or (2) by writing it in the center of the sheet in line with the salutation. The choice between these methods will usually be determined by the question whether the letter, although written to a firm or corporation, is to be addressed to the attention of some particular individual. In this case, suggestion No. 1 may be followed:

No. 1.

Chicago, Ill., December 9, 1920

The Holtzer-Cabot Electric Co.
6161 South State St. Reference: Your letter
Chicago, Ill. ERH/FL Dec. 3, 1920

Gentlemen: Attention of Mr. E. R. Harding

Most business letters now-a-days bear the initials of the person who has dictated the letter, as well as those of the stenographer, thus: JAP/RF. It is a simple matter to use these, along with the date of the letter itself, as a means of identification, when making reference to it. This has been done in No. 1 above.

Or, if it is not desired to address the letter to the attention of any particular individual, the following form, which also makes use of the initials of the writer and the stenographer, may be followed:

No. 2

Chicago, Ill., December 2, 1920

The Holtzer-Cabot Electric Co.
6161 South State St.
Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: Reference ERH/FL Dec. 3, 1920

Some such practice as this serves to put No. 2 just

mentioned on a par with No. 1 shown above, and thus either form clears the way for the actual opening of the letter itself, unencumbered with references to previous correspondence that may serve to distract the attention from an otherwise forceful beginning. With either of these forms the writer is free to frame his opening as he may desire, unencumbered with formalities that are nevertheless needed in order to connect what is about to be said with the letter to which it refers.

It may be said, in passing, that whenever possible, it is wise to head a letter with the line shown in No. 1 above. It serves to give a personal touch that usually predisposes the individual who receives the letter to a little warmer interest, because of the personal element involved in such an introductory line.

No matter which form is adopted, however, the writer, by means of either one, is in a position to make a strong start, freed from all encumbrance of introductory formalities. And right here he must be on his guard against the conventional opening phrases that destroy all hope of attracting interest and attention: "We beg to call your attention to," "In reply to yours of——, we beg to state," etc. Some of the worst of conventional phrases of this sort are listed at the end of this chapter, and should be carefully studied in this connection. (See the section entitled "Futile Phrases.")

It is, of course, perfectly feasible to avoid the use of either of the foregoing forms. A letter may well make reference to former correspondence by its opening sentence being framed as follows:

The wireless receivers that you inquired about in your letter of December 3 are of the same resistance as those in use by the Signal Corps of the U. S. Army.

By this means you connect your reader with his previous letter to you, and plunge at once into your subject, making use of some such sentence as that employed above to gain his interest at the start. How to grip the interest must be decided by a study of the correspondent's letter, from which can be deduced what it is that he most wishes to know. A suitable and appropriate opening sentence will at least insure an interested reading of what follows.

Remember at the very outset that, in writing to your prospect, you are *talking* to him on a business proposition. He is probably so accustomed to the tame and fossilized opening that one differing from the ordinary will, of itself, serve to arrest his attention, in the same manner as will the appearance of a strange and unusual hat on the head of a stranger on a fashionable street. Beware, however, lest in your attempt at originality, your opening be bizarre or flippant, which may, it is true, arrest the attention, but may be followed by resentment or indignation at the undue familiarity implied by your tone.

There are as many ways of beginning a letter as there are of beginning a conversation, but, as the wise salesman tries to arouse his customer's interest before talking business, so must the writer of a letter, though in briefer manner. On p. 15 we discussed the importance of the "you" element in letters, and it is discussed at greater length below. Here, however, is where the application of the principle begins. This means that your *customer's* needs or tastes or desires are the subjects that will interest him and win his attention, not *your* wishes or hopes, or the condition of *your* business.

Compare the opening sentences of the following and note the difference between the two:

No. 1.

In pursuance of your request of December 3, we beg to enclose herewith our illustrated folder, showing the Equipoise Telephone Arm in a variety of forms. If you will look it over and let us know which one interests you, we shall take pleasure in filling your order for whatever style you may desire.

We are selling the Arm in large numbers just now, and we are confident that it will prove highly satisfactory to you.

Hoping to receive your valued order, we are, etc.

No. 2.

It is evident from your inquiry about the Equipoise Telephone Arm that you are one of those who have suffered from the annoyance of the desk phone. Like so many other victims, you have probably been exasperated by the twisted cord dragging through your papers, and upsetting your ink-well. And the phone itself got in your way, didn't it, and was always being knocked over by your elbow?

Well, here is a device that offers you sure relief. It holds the phone away from the desk until you want it; when a touch of the finger brings it into position.

Look over the illustrated circular now sent you. It shows a variety of ways in which the Arm can be attached to your desk, and be kept out of your way. Tell us what sort of desk you have and we will do the rest for you--and as you will note, at an absurdly low price. Your troubles are over when the Arm arrives by parcel post, ready for use.

No. 1 is of the perfunctory sort, and if it results in a sale, it does so simply because the customer intended to buy, anyhow. Yet it is a form of letter that is written every day by the thousands. No. 2, on the other hand,

strikes a sympathetic chord in the reader's mind at the very outset, and tends to interest him more and more, as he reads on.

Note, too, a highly important difference between the two letters. In No. 1 "we" and "us" are the dominant pronouns; the writer is thrusting *his* point of view and *his* experience upon the prospect. In No. 2 the "you" (the prospective customer) predominates; it is the reader's experience that is depicted, the reader's relief that is suggested. In other words, the reader is told something that *he wanted to know*, and is not wearied and annoyed by being told in generalities what the writer thinks and what a good business he is doing.

Herein lies a principle of the highest importance: *the necessity of giving prominence to the "you," and of keeping the "we" in the background.* Bearing in mind what was said above, namely, that it is the customer's needs and not your wishes and your business that interest him, the "you" element is necessary to arrest his attention and to awaken and retain his interest. The ordinary letter ignores this principle. Its opening sentence almost invariably contains a "we," and the "we" aspect is played up throughout. Is it reasonable to expect the reader to be interested in that? And since he certainly is not, is it reasonable to expect such a letter to do anything towards winning him over? On the contrary, it kills his interest from the start, although, as a matter of fact, his interest is the one thing you want to awaken.

This, then, is the practical way of making your opening attract attention: to remember that your prospect is interested in himself, in his own affairs, in his own needs, in his own advantage.

If this principle is kept in mind, it will, of course,

be out of the question that the letter should begin with any of the stereotyped phrases which too often characterize ordinary business letters. Obviously, if the letter is to open with the "you" spirit uppermost, it cannot begin with phrases such as: "In reply to yours of the 9th, we beg to advise that," etc. It is just as easy—and far more effective—to convert the customary dead phrase into a living, personal one, and yet to accomplish the necessary reference to previous correspondence, by saying, for example: "The type of motor that you are interested in, and about which you inquire in your letter of the 7th, is," etc. Here is no wasted formality, and the reader is led at once to what interests him without the deadening effect of getting through preliminary phraseology that tells him nothing.

(b) *Original Sales Letters*.—It is, of course, easier to make the opening of reply letters interesting by this means than it is to devise interesting openings for sales letters which address the prospect without his having first written a letter of inquiry.

Aside from the dignified, quiet, unemotional form of opening such as is illustrated on p. 27, there are three kinds of opening letters which have the hall-mark of success. One of these is the interrogative opening—asking the reader a direct question with the first words. Another is the declarative, telling him some fact without any preliminary. The third is the "human interest" opening.

1. *The Interrogative Opening*.—This form is illustrated on p. 67, where the letter begins with the question: "Have you a dollar bill in your pocketbook * * * that you're not particularly fond of?" This method carries with it a suggestion of familiarity, which is not always in good taste or appreciated by the reader. It

is easy to offend by being too personal—particularly when one is addressing a prospect with whom one is not acquainted. Yet this method of arresting attention can be made highly effective if care is taken to strike just the right note or tone. Let us here turn back to the two openings shown on p. 27. Suppose we convert No. 2 into an interrogative opening. It might then read after this fashion: "Have YOU suffered from the annoyance of having your desk phone cord disturb your papers and upset the inkwell?" or, "Haven't you suffered long enough from the annoyance of having your desk phone," etc., or yet again: "If you were offered a device that would rid you of the desk phone nuisance, wouldn't you welcome it?" None of these is impertinent, breezy, or familiar in tone, although any one of them is calculated to arouse interest in the mind of the *properly selected prospect*. The point, then, is that the interrogative form of opening can be utilized to good effect if its tone is regulated to suit the class to which the sales letter is to be sent.

This sort of opening is always more effective when made to form a paragraph by itself.

2. *The Declarative Opening.*—In order to arrest the attention this should, of course, be forceful and positive in making some brief statement of fact, and the statement must be so chosen as to strike a responsive chord in the reader's mind. It, too, needs to be adapted to the class of reader to whom it is addressed. The opening of No. 2 on p. 27, referred to in the preceding paragraph, is unemotional and dignified. It is not, however, of the sort commonly meant by the term "declarative," although it is actually so, grammatically speaking. A more forceful statement is usually understood to be meant, such, for example, as: "Here at last is an

I was sent to France on the transport _____ in 1917.

Each night, while crossing the Atlantic, all lights were extinguished, or obscured by covered windows, through fear that they might attract a torpedo attack. And so, perforce, we often had to grope around in darkness and discomfort.

What would we not have given at that time had we been able to make use of an electric torch to save our shins in the gloom, and to help us find our way to cabin doors!

While that particular experience is happily past and done with, each of us finds ourselves at one time or another with just as urgent a desire for a flashlight guide as some of us did in 1917 on our way to France. We go into the back yard or to the basement; the car breaks down in the dark country road; a sudden call in the night necessitates light, but to turn on the light would awaken others. How futile it is at that moment to wish that we had had the forethought to get one!

The _____ electric torch meets each such a need. It is light and portable, easily carried in the pocket, or laid under the pillow.
(and so on)

Example of a letter whose opening paragraph utilizes some current event to interest the reader and which connects the opening subject with the real sales subject of the letter.

end of the desk phone nuisance!" or, "You need relief from the desk phone nuisance—and here it is!" It may be felt that these examples just given border rather dangerously on the "breezy" style condemned in the preceding paragraph. Certainly an opening sentence of this style must be worded with a full understanding in advance of the mental attitude of the class of prospects to be addressed. Such phrases as those given are effective when addressed to a certain type of reader; they are offensive to the reader of another type, who is just as valuable, if you can secure his custom.

A "declarative" opening of this sort may be made to appeal strongly to the reader's desire for economy or money-saving. A letter intended to sell labor-saving devices, as, for example, a washing machine or a vacuum cleaner; or a money-saver, as, for example, an improved carburetor or a new form of electric light globe, etc., might well open with the declarative statement: "You have paid for a _____ many times over—but you have never had it delivered." An explanation would follow, of course, showing how money spent in the past on costly time and labor would have paid for the economical device many times over.

This style of opening, too, is more effective as an interest awakener when written alone as the opening paragraph.

3. *The "Human Interest" Opening.*—As the term implies, this sort of opening is calculated to awaken interest at the same time that it attracts attention. Indeed, it frequently is carried over to the entire letter, and colors it throughout. There are so many keys and tones of human interest that its use can be illustrated in a general way only. Illustrations will at least serve to show how the circumstances of any proposed sale may

That morning cup of coffee! You are not "much good" until you get it, are you? You look forward to it on rising; and the delicious aroma that reaches you while it is being prepared serves only to intensify your pleasurable anticipations. And when you sit down expectantly to sip the steaming cup, you feel you will soon "be yourself."

What a disappointment it is, then, to have to swallow a dull and uninvigorating fluid that belies its aroma, and produces none of the inspiring and delightful effects that you looked forward to!

The trouble lies in the brand. Unwisely chosen, your coffee is good only by chance, by good luck. Too often, luck is against you, and it's poor!

Still, that's easily remedied. "The brand's the thing!" Get the right brand, and you are sure of a real cup of coffee 365 mornings in the year.

(and so on)

A sample opening for a letter containing a human-interest appeal to the appetites, which, when addressed to the right class of individuals, is calculated to awaken interest in what the letter has to offer.

be taken advantage of by a thoughtful letter writer to turn the reader's interest in a general subject of news, or the like, into a channel which will lead him to the subject the writer has at heart.

Briefly, this method involves an appeal to the prejudices, the passions, the affections, the vanities, the emotions, the interests, entertained by the different groups which make up a community of society in general. For instance, an appeal to the appetites is illustrated in the letter on p. 33. Written to the "lady of the house," this sort of letter tends to awaken and hold her interest through the appeal to her desires.

Again, "human interest" is successfully invoked by reference to a well-known or important occurrence which has no *direct* connection with the product offered, but is skilfully adapted in its application to it. Note the illustration in which reference is made to crossing the Atlantic during the period when the torpedoing of vessels by the enemy was at its height, or the one in which the "old gentleman" of the Patent Office (see p. 36) is made to serve as the opening subject.

Or, once again, the appeal may be to the common human instincts, for example, that of fear. Note the illustration of this in the letter suggesting possible blindness, and the means by which it may be prevented.

This sort of human interest tone may characterize the beginning of the letter alone, or it may color the letter as a whole. It may be made to serve as a means of getting attention only, or it may be carried on into the body of the letter as a further means of exciting interest and of stimulating desire. We shall come to these latter elements later on, but it is worth while to note that the "human interest" element is capable of as many shades of flexibility and of adaptability as there are emotions to

How about your eyes?

Do you suffer from stinging pains, from fiery balls crossing your line of vision, from dull globes that obstruct the sight?

If you do, only glasses will save you from ultimate blindness.

(and so on)

Type of opening appealing to the emotions (of fear, of self-interest, etc.) of the reader, as a basis for the sales argument to follow in the body of the letter.

The old gentleman who resigned from the Patent Office in 1886 because, as he said, everything had been invented, had nothing on the most of us.

There are times when we all begin to feel that mechanical equipment is about as perfect as man can make it.

Take lubrication, for instance. In spite of the thousands of dollars wasted in furnishing six ounces of oil to a bearing that needs only one, production men are satisfied--until, of course, someone comes along and shows them where 500 per cent can be saved.

Making production men dissatisfied with their lubrication equipment is our business. Here is a new kind of Bolshevism that pays all around.

(and so on)

Illustration of a "narrative" or "human interest" opening, which succeeds in awakening the interest, prior to the explanation and description, which, of course, follow the part of the letter shown above.

appeal to, or illustrative circumstances to refer to. It is as effective with the serious business man as with the society debutante or the clerk—provided always the nature of the “human interest” tone, and the subject chosen, are *adapted to the prospect*.

But no matter what style of opening you may think appropriate for a given case, it should never be forgotten that your prospect is not paid to read your letter, and will do so only if it interests him. If you know the buying motives to which you ought to appeal in a given class of prospects, and if you know your subject thoroughly, you do not need to be startling or dramatic in your opening, just for the fun of being original. Your style of opening has got to suit the style of prospect. But in any case you do need to be interesting—your opening must catch the attention. *What will interest your reader* must be the criterion by which you will decide how to begin.

2. THE DESCRIPTION

Here, again, the “you” element must be played up. It is not enough to give your prospect a full, even a minute, description of the article you wish to sell him. In the abstract, the Telephone Arm may be a perfect device, mechanically; it may be made so strong that it cannot be broken or worn out; it may be so attractive in appearance as to be really an ornamental addition to the desk; its manufacture may be covered by patents; it may even be the only device of its kind on the market. But to all but a few these are merely abstract facts that have little or no personal application, and, as we have seen, it is the point of contact with the needs or the advantage of *the prospect* that must be sought for. If

it is possible to show him how an Arm will relieve him from his previous annoyances, change his exasperation into satisfaction, make routine easier and desk work less burdensome, it is certain that he will feel the personal appeal, while all the arguments regarding mechanical perfection, attractive design, etc., may awaken no responsiveness whatever.

Here, then, is the practical application of the principle discussed on p. 18, namely, the necessity of knowing the point of view of your prospect—whether he be a private individual or a merchant—and of establishing a psychological contact with him, just as you would in conversation.

Turn again, now, to the contrasted samples of letters given on p. 27. In the light of what has been said, compare the language of No. 1, noting well the underscored words in each:

We are sending you our folder, showing the Arm in a variety of forms. If you will look it over and let us know which one appeals to you, we shall take pleasure in filling your order. We are selling the Arm in large numbers, and are confident that it will prove highly satisfactory.

with that of No. 2:

It is evident that you are one of those who have suffered from the annoyance of the desk phone; you have probably been exasperated, etc. Here is a device that offers you sure relief. . . . Tell us what sort of desk you have and we will do the rest for you.

Aside from the question of the “we” and the “you” element, note the utter absence of salesmanship in No. 1, in that there is no effort made to sell; note the lack

of all description, and observe the manner in which the prospect is referred to the circular for all that he might be interested in knowing. Then note how, in No. 2, the prospect's condition of mind is divined and sympathetically referred to, and the description of the device is such as to make it clear *why* it will benefit him. Thus the personal element—the “you” element—blends with the description, so that the latter will, in its turn, awaken interest.

The principle to be noted is, then, that the description must be such as to develop an interest on the part of the reader in the thing described. And this can be done only when he is shown *why* the thing should appeal to *him*, *how* it can be serviceable to *him*, and in what manner it will contribute to *his* advantage or to *his* comfort. Observe, too, that this is not to be accomplished by bludgeon blows. He is not to be told: “We are now going to describe this thing to you and show you why you should be interested.” It is to be done subtly, by means of the appeal to his personal environment, to his own advantage or satisfaction. And from this sort of appeal he is to be left to *infer* something—his imagination is to be played on.

Thus a very few words will sometimes suffice to convey description through suggestion—and the awakened imagination will do the rest. The following are examples of sentences that describe just sufficiently to start the imagination to working:

Thick, creamy chocolate coverings, containing tempting fillings of jelly, nougat, caramel, nut, and other delightful flavors.

These cigars combine mildness with full flavor. They are designed to make every smoker smile with comfort and enjoyment.

Pineapple—the golden, luscious kind—makes a delicious dessert, tempting ices, gratifying sherbets and fruit cups.

These shoes need no “breaking in”—they’re just solid comfort from the first moment when you put them on.

When mother shoos the players off to bed, someone is sure to exclaim: “Who turned the clock ahead?”

People look at your face when they speak to you; at your mouth when you reply. Do justice to your skin and your teeth by using both of these Colgate Comforts.

Our jams give you that “more-ish” feeling. And they make your mouth water.

These are simply examples, pieked at random, of possible description which relies on the imagination of the reader. If your suggestion is apt and appropriate, he will himself visualize the effect that the goods will producee for him personally. This is a subtle method whieh, if skilfully employed, will go much farther in stimulating interest than a mere description of details can ever accomplish.

After all, what is the object of description? Clearly it would not be of much importance if it did not serve to *interest* the prospect in the product. Thus it is obvious that the description must be made *interesting to the prospect*. No customer can be expected to buy until he is interested. And in trying to effect a sale by means of a letter, it is, of course, impossible to interest the reader without some sort of description. The words “some sort” are used advisedly, and we shall now explain why.

We have repeatedly emphasized the necessity of knowing every detail of a commodity before it can be offered effectively to purchasers, and it is here that the point of this becomes most evident. Clearly, what will interest one class of persons will not appeal to others.

although the product offered be the same in both cases. The Equipoise Telephone Arm, for instance, commends itself to the bed-ridden cripple for reasons wholly different from those that interest the office man. To the cripple, the fact that it makes the telephone accessible without exertion is the interesting feature; the business man is chiefly concerned, perhaps, with the fact that the devicee keeps his telephone out of the way, and removes all risk of the disturbance of papers, etc., when it is used. Thus discrimination must be used in choosing the features to be described to the class of prospect to be appealed to, and an intimate familiarity with the article will alone make this possible. It is, also, just as necessary to avoid phases of the subject that will not interest your prospect as it is to choose those that will. Description is worth while only when it serves to interest a prospective customer. And only those features or details *that will interest the man you are writing to* are those which should be described *to him*. To be able to select appropriate features to describe to one class of prospects, and to stress others when appealing to another class, and yet to be able to sell the same article to each class, requires good judgment, of course; but it requires above all a knowledge of the article itself thorough enough to make such discrimination possible.

The trained salesman knows that he must sell his article to the country trade by using talking points different from those he uses with the city merchant. The sales letter-writer must have the same perception and must frame his letters on the same principles.

But this is not all, by any means. *How shall the description be framed so as to make it interesting?* That, after all, is the main question, and it calls for imagination as well as the knowledge of the "talking

points" of which we have just spoken. There is not much difficulty in deciding which of the two descriptions following is more likely to seize on the imagination and awaken the desire to buy.

No. 1

The Equipoise Arm is made of cold-drawn steel, handsomely finished. It can be fastened to the wall above the bed or at its side, so as to make it possible to bring it into position without exertion. It thus becomes accessible to anyone reclining there.

No. 2

You never know! Some day, you or your loved one may be lying in bed, injured or sick. Then it is that weariness, pain, or simple lonesomeness, or perhaps business cares, add their weight to the leaden passage of the weary hours. The desire for an opportunity of talking to someone "on the outside" becomes overpowering. Too sick to make the exertion of moving; the body unable to turn to lift the telephone from the table at the bedside, the invalid naturally frets and grows increasingly lonesome as the hours pass.

What a relief it would be merely to lift the arm and with a touch of the finger cause the telephone to swing lightly into such a position that you could use it without effort or strain!

The Equipoise Telephone Arm makes this possible. It brings the outside world to the bedside--and without an effort. It demands no impossible exertion, no exercise of strength that is not possessed.

The first of these examples is not very likely to appeal to anyone interested in an invalid, present or prospective. It cannot, indeed, be said to have anything *interesting* in it. Yet it is the sort of description most likely

to be written by the unthinking—because it requires little or no thought.

It is, then, necessary to exercise the imagination in describing your product in a manner adapted to the need of the prospective customer. And it is always possible to figure this out, in a general way, when the class of prospects is determined upon. For we know, in a general way, that specific classes of human beings possess tastes, habits, ideals and prejudices in common, and that the individuals of the class can be counted on to show substantially the same reaction to an appeal accurately and skilfully adapted to the characteristic reactions of the class.

It is suggested that the reader should here refer again to what is said on p. 18 about the need of imagination and the manner in which it should be exercised, in describing the product.

It may often happen that the giving of an adequate description would prove so lengthy an affair as to obscure and weaken the sales argument of the letter. A very practical method of combining lengthy descriptive features with a sales letter is to print, on the back of the letter itself, an attractive (and illustrated, if desired) description of the product offered in the letter. In the body of the letter, in connection with a sales talk, the reader is requested to turn to the other side of the sheet for a more minute description, and if the references to the product in the letter itself are made sufficiently interesting, the reader may be counted on to comply with the suggestion, especially if it is accompanied by the further suggestion that he will find there something to interest him. This method has the advantage of first awakening an interest by a lively sales talk in the letter, and of then supplementing the latter by the description

on the other side of the sheet. There is always the fact to be borne in mind that such descriptive matter, if sent out in any other printed form, runs a far greater risk of landing in the waste-basket—that haven of wasted advertising matter—than it does when forming practically a part of a sales letter. (See, further, on this subject, pp. 56, 100-102.)

3. EXPLANATION, ARGUMENT, AND PERSUASION

Up to this point in the construction of the letter, we have seen that the first step involves arresting the attention; that the next step is to awaken in the reader's mind an interest in the thing proposed or offered. This is, of course, only the beginning of the course over which it is proposed to lead him.

The third step is to *develop* the interest by such an arresting and attractive explanation of the proposition that it will naturally awaken desire for what is laid before him by your word picture. A certain amount of argument, skilfully blended with persuasion, must necessarily follow, with the thought ever present in your mind that the final persuasive drive must have the definite object of bringing the reader to a *decision*. This will prove to be not so complicated a process as it sounds, provided always that the principle discussed above be kept in mind, that is, that a letter should be regarded as in the nature of a written conversation. In conversation, these different stages in leading the prospect up to a sale are reached logically and smoothly and naturally, each dovetailing into the other. And so it can be, in the case of a written letter, if the writer will visualize himself as talking to the prospect.

While it is proposed to consider separately the three

subjects named at the head of this section, it should be explained beforehand that they are not separate and distinct in the sense of each having its definite place in the scheme of the letter. Each should blend with the other, imperceptibly and naturally, as is, of course, the ease in conversation. And the writer who has learned to make good use of "style," and of good English (see p. 77), will find that it has its fullest use at this stage.

1. *Explanation*.—This term, which is used for want of a better one, means, in brief, the giving of a word-picture of the proposition, whether it be a sale of goods or a sale of service that is proposed. Here will appear the force of the principle insisted on above (pp. 11-15), that one must know one's proposition inside out. Word-pictures cannot be painted without, first, a command of good English; without, next, a knowledge of detail; and without, finally, the artist's eye with which to visualize the effect of the whole. And to convert your picture into words that will convey your visualization to the minds of others—that is an art requiring much thought and study. You cannot afford to approach this phase of the work superficially or hurriedly.

Explanation, in practice, is to be addressed to two classes; those who know nothing about the product, and those who know about it in a general way but need particulars, or need to be impressed with the superiority of your product over that of similar kinds on the market. In the first case every detail has to be told that is necessary for the purpose in view—and he is an artist who can judge unerringly what these are, in every instance. In the second case the word-picture is of a different sort, for here the high lights are painted in—the points of superiority of your product over others

of the same general kind being the chief subject of interest.

Explanation, of course, extends beyond mere descriptive detail. It involves description of the goods and such explanation of their uses, their application, their desirability, their superiority, etc., as will form the word picture necessary to interest the prospect.

In the matter of explanation, too many letters lose their effectiveness because the writer has the mistaken impression that he must make his story "short." The theory that business letters must be short has almost reached the dignity of a law in most business offices; and this is commonly thought to apply to all letters alike. Many grievous mistakes have been committed in the name of this spurious "law," and many serious losses have resulted from its observance. There is too often a grievous misapprehension of what is involved in the observance of the "Five C's" of business letters, i. e., Clearness, Correctness, Conciseness, Courtesy, and Character.

Let it be understood at once that a "brief" letter is not necessarily a "short" letter. Among the definitions given by Webster of each of these words, we have selected the following, as serving to emphasize our point:

Brief, concise.

Short, inadequate, deficient, defective, imperfect, abrupt, petulant:

If we apply these definitions to the situation we are considering, it will be clear that while a letter may be—and ought to be—*brief*, i. e., concise; a *short* letter is one to be avoided under all circumstances. In plain English, the only meaning that this supposed "law"

has for us is that a letter should be concise, using no unnecessary words. But there is no absolute limit to be set as the allowable length of a business letter. Four, five, six pages, *if needed* in order to tell the story adequately, are infinitely more effective than a letter in which the desirable details are omitted for brevity's sake. Lengthy letters, if correctly framed and interestingly written, will be read as readily as those of one page or less—often more readily—even as a story of five or six pages will be read—if it interests the reader. This is the only test. For the purposes of adequate explanation, therefore, the length of a letter ought never to be arbitrarily restricted.

On the other hand, many a sale has been killed by too much talking—or writing. The problem is to say enough, and no more than enough. It would obviously be fatal to omit a feature or a fact that you feel sure would appeal strongly to your prospect merely because the inclusion of it would extend your letter beyond a single page. It would be equally fatal to include features which, however, interesting to someone else, have no interest for your reader, or to continue to explain or argue or persuade after you have said enough to convince him. Remember that his only means of shutting you off is to stop reading your letter. But this is so easy for him to do, that the moment you begin to suspect that he would stop, you had better anticipate him by stopping yourself.

The task at this stage is, then, to develop the interest which the opening part of the letter will have aroused. With the removal of the bugaboo that the sales letter must be limited to one page, there is less difficulty in realizing that the explanation required for this purpose is one that is thorough enough to cause the awakened

interest to be sustained and developed, as the story progresses. Just how this is to be done, whether by a long or by a short explanation, is a question of judgment and depends on circumstances, of course—especially on the general characteristics of the class of prospects appealed to. In view of the fact that it is the prospect's interest that is involved, the explanation must be given from the standpoint of a purchaser, not from that of a seller.

For example, if we use the same illustration of the Telephone Arm that we made use of above (p. 27), it is not so much a question of the high grade of material of which it is constructed, or of its appearance, but of what it will do for *him*, how it can be fixed to his desk, his bed, his easy chair, or to the floor, how it will meet his needs in every situation, how it will save his temper, how it will spare him the annoyance of having someone disturb his desk when using his phone. Details such as these constitute an explanation that will lead him through the different degrees of interest to the point where he is conscious of a desire for the device. And that is the function of explanation.

As a rule it is wiser to defer the mention of the price until the desirability or the effectiveness of the product have been made sufficiently impressive.

Sometimes the question of how best to present the detail of price will require considerable thought. To the true salesman price itself is not so important a consideration as is the *reason* for the price. If the product is justifiably offered at a figure higher than the price of a competing product, the *reason* for this must be found in its higher quality, its greater effectiveness, its longer life, etc. In short, it must be shown to possess qualities which the cheaper product does not possess, and which make it worth more. To one who knows his business,

therefore, the mere fact that his product costs more than the other fellow's is never a matter of concern, provided he can point to quality and greater usefulness as reasons. The principle underlying the difference in *value* between a \$500 flivver and a \$5,000 high-powered car is so palpable, as to call for no discussion. The principle is equally applicable in less obvious cases, where explanation of the reason for the higher price is perhaps called for.

The opposite is true where the price is lower than that of the competing product. In this case the price is an inducement, and is accordingly made a feature of prominence. But unless this is properly done, it may fail to interest, because of the natural suspicion that a low price argues poor quality. Here, then, the *reason* is again an important element in the explanation. This may be found in quantity production, as having lowered the manufacturing cost, in the fortunate purchase of a bankrupt stock, in the desire to close out an entire line, etc. Whatever the reason, it must be convincing—the elements of a real bargain must be shown to be present.

2. *Argument and Proof.*—We have already urged the wisdom of the policy of telling only the truth. Here is where this policy counts most surely. Sincerity is more convincing than good grammar or a wide vocabulary, and infinitely more effective than the most elaborately told untruth. The conviction to be striven for is a state of mind in which confidence, belief, reason, take the place of ignorance, disbelief, indifference, or uncertainty. The customer is led to reason himself into the belief that your goods are adapted to his use and that he needs them, and that since they have given satisfaction to others under circumstances similar to his,

they will also satisfy him. This conviction is founded on the production of satisfactory proof of some kind. But conviction alone does not effect a sale. I may be convinced that your product is the best on the market, but if I don't *desire* it, I don't buy.

A full description of a fire engine may be given me, even to its minutest part, and may be couched in the language commanded by a "silver-tongued" orator. You may "prove" to me that it is the most efficient machine of its kind that is procurable. But unless you can show me that *I need* that fire engine or can benefit in some way by becoming its possessor, I shall not buy it—I shall not even desire it for my own. Thus description of the product and proof of the truth of the description are not enough to make me buy. It is necessary that I be made to *desire* the article. And this can be accomplished only by showing me how I shall gain something by acquiring it: either profit, economy, satisfaction, comfort, enjoyment or gratification, etc. Thus "proof," mentioned above, embraces this element—proof of what the product will do for *me*, proof of what gratification it will give *me*, if I buy it.

Once more, then, we encounter the fact that the prospect's self-interest is what must be played up to above all else, if the appeal is to be successful. It is the only channel through which desire is to be awakened.

The prospect has, let us suppose, been brought to the point of considering favorably what has been offered him. In many cases further argument is unnecessary, even unwise; and "proof" of your claims—direct proof—may in the nature of the case be impossible. It is of course necessary to know when to let well enough alone, and when to spring your final "clinch" move, which we shall discuss in a later section of this chapter.

No, we are not starting a booster campaign, but we are selling Sioux City to the large manufacturers and jobbers who want to locate in a live and steady market. In addition to the natural opportunities inherent to the proposition, we are offering CO-OPERATION.

• • • • • • • • •

We'd like to help YOU, by submitting in full detail what Sioux City has to offer YOU.

Why not write us about your wishes and your needs?

Opening and close of a letter sent by the Chamber of Commerce to large manufacturers and jobbers. Note how the opening paragraph seeks to awaken interest, while dispelling doubt about the scheme being a low-grade one. Note, too, the personal note in the closing paragraphs. Considering the class to which the letter was sent, and considering the momentous step involved in the proposition, the climax is as urgent as it ought to be and no more.

But in many cases the explanation of the offer, however attractively put, cannot be expected to leave the prospect in a condition of mind in which he will voluntarily act without further ado. Something more in the way of proof is needed. If you are offering him, say, furniture, or underwear, he must be told how it will appeal to his own use or to his customers, and how he is to be the gainer, whether in enjoyment or in additional profit, in increased trade, in better satisfied customers, or what not. And this naturally comes after the explanation of the offer itself. If you know your subject properly and thoroughly, you can explain attractively how your offer will appeal to his trade, just how your line will show him a profit, and by what methods he can best attain this result. This is argument, and this is proof, of a sort, blended so as to *develop interest*. It is up to you to show him *why* he should buy, and *how* he will be the gainer if he does—and to *prove* it by facts and by suggestions.

Proof may be effectively offered by sending a sample of the goods, or perhaps a sample of the article on ten or on thirty days' trial; by referring by name to satisfied customers in the same town or locality; by copies of testimonials, provided always that these are palpably honest and above suspicion; by any act, in short, which frankly puts your cards on the table and makes the prospect feel that you have placed yourself in his hands, to be judged by him alone. This is the most convincing sort of proof.

Aside from arguing that your product is honestly worth the price, and superior to others offered at the same price, there are concrete methods of proof which are highly effective. Figures may be submitted showing how a machine or device can be operated by cheaper

labor than is required for others of like purpose, how it will save money for the purchaser and thus pay for itself; if feasible, a sample may voluntarily be sent with the first letter, to be tested by the prospect in his own way; or an offer to send the device on trial, to be tested and tried out at the seller's expense, will generally elicit a favorable response. Methods of this sort are effective argument and, while serving as the most convincing proof of your assertions, offer strong evidence of your thorough good faith. In this connection, see the illustration given on p. 63.

After all, what is proof? Literally, of course, it means an actual demonstration, of some sort, of the truth of one's assertions. In practice, however, conviction may be said to be a frequent substitute for it. If you can convince me, I am likely to feel that I have all the proof I need. Thus there is a sort of indirect proof, as well as direct proof. An offer to send goods on trial, or with the privilege of returning them if not satisfactory or if not as represented, is often so convincing as to take the place of direct proof. I argue, perhaps, that the manufacturer or merchant would never make such an offer unless he was sure of his statements and amply able to prove them. Thus his offer serves to convince me, and I accept it in lieu of proof.

So the varnish manufacturer who advertises that I may pour boiling water on his varnished surfaces without affecting the varnish, "proves" his claims by carrying conviction to my mind by his rather startling proposal. After all, the sincerity of the offer, the length to which you are willing to go, if necessary to prove your claims, is, to many people, more convincing than the actual proof itself might be, and is itself accepted as if it were real evidence.

This sort of offer is pretty good "proof" of sincerity:

Please remember that these goods are offered you on the distinct understanding that if they are not entirely satisfactory, they may be returned at our expense, and your money will then be promptly refunded.

If you succeed in convincing me of your sincerity, I am more than likely to regard your claims as proved.

Fundamentally, therefore, frankness, a tone of sincerity, of open honesty, in the statements made about the product, is often more effective than ocular proof would be; certainly more so than testimonials, reports, and remote testimony of that sort. If you believe in your goods and are willing to back your belief by an offer which involves their return—and therefore a potential loss to yourself—in case there is anything wrong with them, the *sincerity of the tone* of your letter will generally carry the same "proof" to my mind as the ocular proof of having the goods before me would accomplish.

An examination at this point of the illustrative letters on p. 63 and on pp. 64 and 65 will serve to emphasize what has just been said.

3. *Persuasion*.—It was intimated at the beginning of this section that argument and persuasion must blend. Argumentativeness which is too clearly argumentative, will often do more harm than good. Along with what has been said in the preceding section must go the persuasiveness of him who is himself thoroughly convinced. Yet, as with argument, persuasion must be indirect, and not openly apparent.

Persuasion is that element which leads to affirmative action. Your prospect may have "conviction," but he does not necessarily buy, for all that. But persuasion, following hard on proof and conviction, will itself

awaken desire and lead him to the act of buying. The "Do it now!" class of phrases, to which we shall have occasion to refer more specifically later on, are but crudely persuasive in themselves. Their persuasiveness lies in their being used as a climax to the rest of the persuasive language which leads up to the phrase. Some form of persuasion, however, must follow proof.

The direct method of an attempt at persuasion is often not persuasive at all. The "Can you afford to do without it?" or the "Buy today, won't you?" line of talk is to most persons more like annoyance than persuasion. If you have been at all dignified or impressive in what you have said up to this point, this sort of "coaxing" seems an undignified descent to the methods of the cheap huckster.

Indirect persuasion is accomplished more by suggestion than by open argument; by suggesting, for instance, that the prospect *needs* the goods, that he will score a distinct advantage by acquiring them, that without them he is losing an opportunity for profit, or that he himself can judge of their salability by such and such facts. Perhaps, even, you may in some cases be able to tell him that your offer is made to him first, because of his reputation or his local standing, or because, in your opinion, he is best able to handle goods of this kind and quality.

After all, as has so often been stated above, the most effective persuasion is that which suggests some form of self-interest, whether it be financial gain, personal comfort, gratification of pride or vanity, or self-indulgence. Yet it must be resorted to sparingly and skilfully, or it will overshoot the mark and do harm, in creating the effect of insincerity.

Bear in mind that the object of argument, of proof,

and of persuasion is to bring the prospect through the stage of desire to the point of decision. The extent to which resort should be had to each of these methods will be largely suggested by the analysis of the prospect, either as an individual or as a member of a class, which has been suggested and discussed on pp. 12, 18. If you really know your man, you know best how to talk to him; and if you know the characteristics of the class, you know—or should know—what not to say in addressing those belonging to that class.

A good illustration of the blending of argument and persuasion in a model manner is to be seen in the letter following, which was sent by a publishing house to engineers, designers, draftsmen, etc. The letter was attached to a facsimile of the cover of the book that it offers, and on the reverse side was printed a concise description of the nature and contents of the book:

Here in your hands is the "shell" of our latest book. What we want you to have is the actual, living work itself--fresh from the press.

We shall be glad to send it to you on request, all delivery charges prepaid, for free examination.

If you are a draftsman or designer, if you have, or hope to have, anything to do with gauges or interchangeable manufacturing, if you are ambitious and alert to follow mechanical progress and improvement, you will be eager to examine this book.

Note (1) the opening that attracts attention; (2) the concise offer; (3) the blending of explanation with argument and persuasion, and, by way of proof, the offer of free examination, "all delivery charges prepaid." Note, too, that description is omitted from the letter—the thought of the writer being that he has said enough to interest his reader to make him turn to the description

that is on the back of the cover. And he bases this assumption on the fact that *he knows his class of prospect*, and he has a right to assume, therefore, that what he has said in the letter will so arouse the interest as to make the reader want more information.

The letter, as written, had one paragraph more than is copied above, and that will be shown and discussed in the next section (p. 65). This letter is well worth study because of the extreme brevity with which it manages to include the essential elements, and because of the manner in which it *suggests* that which it does not specifically embody. It is open to the criticism of having too much "we" in the opening paragraphs; and the second sentence might better have read: "What *you ought* to have," instead of: "What *we want* you to have," etc. With these defects, however, it is still an effective letter, well worth critical study.

Persuasion and inducement follow so closely on the heels of conviction that it is difficult to separate them in practice. If a man is "convinced" that he needs your goods, he is already "persuaded," so far as his reason is concerned. It must be remembered that "proof," as we have discussed it, may mean no more than that the reader is "convinced" that the goods are what you claim for them. He may agree with you on all that you claim for the goods, but he does not necessarily *need* them, and so all the "proof" in the world won't make him buy. Before he will be willing to buy, he has got to be brought to see that he needs the goods himself, and, by bringing the goods before him *in relation to his own needs*, you are offering him the only persuasion that counts for anything.

Thus a vacuum cleaner is sold to a woman by reminding her of the tired back and exhausted condition that

follow her weekly "sweeping." Persuasion is an easy matter if the deviee is shown her in close relation to her own need of the very things the machine will do for her. And this, it should be noted, is not the improvement in sweeping that it accomplishes, but the relief from sweeping that it brings to *her*.

Finally, persuasion may also be exerted by showing that your goods or your brands are preferred by prominent persons to those made by other concerns. A leading perfumery manufacturer, for instance, uses the argument in sales letters that inquiries have developed the fact that 528 women out of 600 were found to prefer a certain brand manufactured by him. To many, this is convincingly persuasive, and, with the facts to back it, can be effectively used with the right class of prospect.

4. THE "CLINCHER" CLIMAX

Many a man has written a good sales letter—until he came to the final paragraph. He has perhaps led his prospect on from awakened interest through aroused and sustained desire to the point where decision, having been formed in the reader's mind, should be clinched, and action should normally result. But—at this point the contact has ceased; the closing paragraph, stale and weak in its language, destroys the effect of all that has gone before, and leaves the reader's mind fluid instead of crystallizing it into action. In other words, you have put in your fruit juices and added your sugar and brought the kettle to a boil—but the jelly won't jell. The result is the same as in the Biblical story, where Agrippa says to Paul: "Almost thou persuadest me"—and then wraps his robe around him, terminates the interview,

The market on has declined since quoting you last and if in need of this material at the present time, we would suggest that you phone or write us before placing your order which will be to your advantage.

Thanking you for attention and awaiting to hear from you at an early date, we remain

Yours very truly,

A sales letter utterly lacking in salesmanship. The letter is short, but it includes in small space so many shortcomings in the matter of grammar, of punctuation, as well as of salesmanship, that it is quoted as a fine example of what does *not* constitute an effective sales letter.

and leaves his interviewer with his object unattained. The effect of Paul's eloquence and persuasiveness is as if it had never been exerted. The spark that should galvanize the listener into action—was missing.

The "almost persuaded" effect is the condition to be dreaded and guarded against in the close of the sales letter.

Let us return once more to our early assertion that a letter is virtually a written sales talk. In the case of the personal interview, as the salesman approaches the point where he hopes actually to book the order, he is particularly careful to say just the right thing in his effort to convert desire into decision and decision into action. He knows that to relax his attention, to say too much, to be futile or to repeat, will easily cause his customer to procrastinate and become evasive—to put the matter off "until a more convenient season." He is, accordingly, through training and experience, thoroughly alive to the need of the final "clincher" which actually makes his prospect reach for his pen and sign the order.

As against this, consider what happens in the average sales letter. The opening serves well, perhaps, to arrest attention, and in the description and explanation that follow the reader may become thoroughly interested. His desire is, let us say, growing, and he has almost decided to buy. Then—by way of anti-climax—he comes to that deadly final paragraph, where he reads: "Hoping to receive your valued order, we are," etc.

Can it be supposed that such a close can win an order that would not have been given anyhow? Suppose that such language were actually used by a salesman in closing an interview. Would it get him anywhere—except out of the door? Yet paragraphs such as this are

regarded as the accepted and proper form of closing a sales letter, and are sent out by the thousand every day. And such letters land in the waste-basket by the thousand every day, too!

Equally deadly is the final paragraph saying: "If there is anything further that we can tell you about this, we shall be glad to do so on request." The salesman would never dream of *saying* this to his prospect. He knows too well the necessity of talking from the standpoint of the listener, and of anticipating his—the listener's—mental action. And so must you, if you would be a letter-writing salesman.

It is the worst mistake imaginable to suppose, as so many do, that a letter that closes without some such phrase as: "Hoping to hear from you shortly, we are, etc.," is abrupt or incomplete. On the contrary, abruptness, in the sense of leaving the correspondent in the full grasp of an important idea, with no vapid drivel to weaken the effect of the last words read, is just the result that should be striven for. Contrast, for example, these two ideas, by taking the close of the letter shown on page 63 and placing it alongside the sort of close we have just mentioned:

Remember, please,
we'll try our very best
to satisfy you. So mail
the order NOW!

Very truly yours,

Remember, please,
we'll try our very best
to satisfy you.

Hoping to hear from
you soon, we are

Yours very truly,

The second form is almost an invitation to the reader to *put off* an immediate reply, and to act "soon," i. e., whenever he gets round to it. And that is probably—never! Then, too, the first example leaves the reader

in the grasp of the idea that he is being offered real individual "service," and that it behooves him to take advantage of the offer in the same spirit, i. e., promptly; while in the second example, the utter lack of confidence on the part of the writer of the letter, implied in the word "hoping," communicates itself to the reader—and he lays the letter aside to await "a more convenient season."

It ought not to be necessary to warn against the use of "bull-dozing" language in the attempt to induce action. Yet an otherwise effective letter may fail in its purpose through the use of tactless language urging action, but unsuited to the prospect. Notice the "please" in the closing paragraph on the next page; observe how the promise to try to suit the prospect softens the effect of the final: "mail the order now!"

Mere forceful language, then, will not alone make the "clincher" effective. Language psychologically adapted to the class of prospect is the vitally important thing. And the writer of sales letters must choose his language with the same care that is exercised by the capable salesman. If you have made the study of your subject and of your different classes of prospects, such as we have urged on pp. 10-15, 18, 45, 56, 84, and 97, you will be able to make your final sentences as effective *for each class of prospects* as the capable salesman does.

In order, then, that all the earlier and effective parts of the letter may not be rendered ineffective and futile; in order that all that has been aimed at and hoped for in the planning of the letter may have the fullest opportunity for achievement, let your close come as a climax that has a psychological pull, and that will bring your prospect's pen to paper with a compelling urge.

You can get a hundred of these cigars simply by writing your name. We don't ask you to send any money. Just fill out the attached order blank and mail NOW. In a few days a parcel-post package of Cigar Enjoyment will arrive. Smoke FIVE cigars at OUR RISK. If you are pleased, send us \$7.50 in three days; otherwise return the rest of the cigars within the same period, and you will owe us nothing.

Remember, please, we'll try our very best to satisfy you. So mail the order NOW.

A good example of the inducement climax, with the "Do it now!" suggestion effectively backed up by the "proof" offer in a most practical form.

We want you to know that we carry the best pipe die made--and we suggest that you make us prove it!

You can do so very easily--and at our expense --if you will send to us for any size you desire, try it out, and then return the die or send us the price.

You'll send us the money and keep the die--for it's the famous Nye skip-tooth die.

Here is a die that operates with 70 per cent less friction than any similar die, and one man can easily thread any 2" pipe with it.

Besides containing the patented skip-tooth feature, the Nye pipe die is relieved or backed-off and is made both in the solid block and in the Armstrong adjustable type. And as to material, there isn't any better procurable anywhere than what goes into these dies.

There are other dies that cost less than these--but they are worth less.

We'd like to get this first order from you, because you will surely want more after trying that first one. This letter ought to convince you, but if it doesn't, the die will.

Our stock is complete and delivery will be prompt. Why bother with the ordinary die? Why not have the best? There's no bother with the Nye die.

Your die is waiting for you. Won't you write us for it?

This is not an ideal letter, but it is forceful, nevertheless. Its opening words arrest the attention; the next paragraph awakens interest; this is sustained, if not increased, through the four succeeding paragraphs of argument and proof, which culminate in the persuasive next two paragraphs. Final action is suggested in the last. There is too much of the "we" element at the start; but when once past that, the reader feels that the letter is written from his standpoint. Note, too, the forceful and persuasive close.

After all, this means no more than giving him *a reason why he should act*—and act at once. We have said enough to make it plain that whatever is said for this purpose, the idea to be stressed must be stressed in the spirit of what has gone before, earlier in the letter. Remember that the successful sales letter must result in a continued progress of growing emotion—attention, interest, desire, decision, action. We are discussing the climax—action. And in endeavoring to produce this, the writer must be even more forceful in his final suggestion than he has been in the body of the letter. At the least, there must be no diminution of the spirit and of the power that have gone before.

Examine, now, once again, the letter that was quoted in part on p. 56; which we now give in full, with its effective “clincher” climax:

Here in your hands is the “shell” of our latest book. What we want you to have is the actual, living work itself--fresh from the press.

We shall be glad to send it to you, all delivery charges prepaid, for free examination, on request.

If you are a draftsman or designer, if you have, or hope to have, anything to do with gauges or interchangeable manufacturing, if you are ambitious and alert to follow mechanical progress and improvement, you will be eager to examine this book.

Simply sign the order card for FREE EXAMINATION, and a copy will be sent you at once.

Observe now the letter as a whole. Notice how it is designed to attract attention and awaken interest (paragraph 1); to stimulate further interest (paragraph 2); to awaken desire and suggest decision (paragraph 3); and finally (paragraph 4), to push the reader “over

the edge," so to speak, and to cause him to act by giving him *a reason why he should act*, and act at once.

This is one form of clincher, combining as it does the "Do it now!" element with an offer of something that will appeal to the self-interest of the reader—and that entails no expense. And this is made still easier and more likely to be acted on by enclosing the "order card" all ready for the mere signature. The decision is thus made to ripen into action by means of the tempting blank that he holds in his hand. He visualizes the act—and it is done! The whole principle of the "clincher" can be deduced by a proper study of this illustrative letter.

Then, as a clincher of another sort, there is the price inducement, the appeal to self-interest by the statement that the "initial" or "introductory" price is good for only so long. This is again an appeal that is difficult to resist.

There is also the very effective suggestion: "Tear off the coupon from this letter. It already bears your name and address. Pin a dollar bill to it, and mail it TO-DAY." Or, if cash is not required with the order, the suggestion to send in the coupon or a self-addressed post-card that is enclosed in your letter is still an effective appeal that demands the minimum of effort for the gratification of self-interest.

A successful publisher who furnishes market and financial advice makes a psychological appeal of considerable force by saying: "Direct your secretary to send for one this morning, when you are dictating." The subtle suggestion that this makes to the reader that he is regarded as a "magnate," and that a request coming from him will be regarded as having been sent through his "secretary," tends to flatter the pride—and to induce

Have you a dollar bill in your pocket-book--an old, spineless one?--that you're not particularly fond of?

Pin it to this card and send it in an envelope to the address above, for the biggest and the best dollar's worth of pure joy a dollar ever bought.

Does it sound like Coney Island? or a gold brick?

It's neither. It's the wisest, wittiest, cleverest little book we've come across in a blue moon--"This Simian World," by Clarence Day, Jr.

No, we're not the publishers.

And this is not a usual horn-blowing. We want to send you the book because it is a "New Republic" sort of book; if you like it, you'll probably like the "New Republic" too!

The book is published by_____

Unstrap that dollar!

Familiarity and "breeziness" are perhaps somewhat overdone here; but the letter is nevertheless a good illustration of the "inducement" argument, coupled with the urge to send in the money, which is made attractive by the simple method proposed.

action. When once the salesman gets the reply he seeks, it is a simple matter to "follow up" with subsequent letters in the effort to make a sale.

It is well to bear in mind that in many of their characteristics men and women are still children. A skilful letter-writer can turn this to good advantage, if he remembers that, taken as a group, people are strongly inclined to do as they are told. Thus a good many people, when they are forcefully urged to "Do it now!" are instinctively inclined to obey—or, shall we say, comply?—without further thought. Thus, psychologically speaking, the way to induce buying action is through some forceful phase of the "Act now!" idea, adapted in tone and language to the individuals addressed.

The psychology involved in the "clincher" close can be noted any day if one will place himself before a retail store window where an attractive display of goods is being made. A passer-by—indeed, many of them—can often be seen to be caught by the attractive showing of, let us say, some desirable shirts and furnishings. He stops, gazes at the goods, turns and bends and examines them with growing interest, is interested to the point of admitting to himself that he likes the shirts and has "half a notion" to buy some of them. He even considers entering the store to do so. But—he hesitates. He begins to think—he thinks he can get them tomorrow or the next time he is passing, just as well as now. He moves slowly on. He has missed the impelling urge of persuasion—for there is none but the mute display itself. He does not buy.

All that was necessary to cause him to buy was some extraneous influence which would impel him to immediate decision and to resulting action. The store win-

dow display sells goods, of course. This is not denied. But there are very many who examine the display who are not fully persuaded through seeing it, and who would be buyers if there was something besides the display to influence them.

The psychology of such a situation is thoroughly appreciated by the owner of, say, a secondhand clothing store. He makes it a point to stand in his doorway where he insistently urges such hesitating prospects as he sees, to enter his store. When once he gets them inside, he generally effects a sale, because he succeeds in crystallizing the customer's hesitation and half-developed desire into decision and resulting action, through his arguments and persuasion.

The sales letter offers the goods—as does the show window. But unless it does more, it is but a mute show window, and is even less attractive, less convincing, than is the attractive display of a good show window. In order to accomplish more, the letter must combine the effect of the offering (the show window of the store) with something that will assist in converting desire into action. It must *clinch* the sale by insistent persuasion so that the final emotion experienced by the reader is determination, followed immediately by action.

Following are illustrations of some of the final phrases that are encountered in successful sales letters:

Send in your order TODAY!

Just clip the coupon and send it in.

Write TODAY if you wish to take advantage of this.

Remember, the offer of a sample is absolutely without strings or conditions.

Your copy is waiting for you—send for it today!

To take advantage of this offer, you must act today.

Write your order at the foot of this letter—and send it in. This offer is final—there will not be another.

Finally, then, the last detail in the framework of the sales letter must be the "clincher." Without it the letter is lame and impotent. Without it, the writer has no right to look for results. The tone, the form, the language of such a "clincher" must depend largely on the nature of the product offered, on the customary mental reactions of the prospects themselves, and, above all, on the writer himself and his insight into his subject and his prospect. This is not a book of forms. All we attempt to do is to stimulate the imagination, while seeking to direct it into the channels which experience has proved to lead to success.

CHAPTER III

DETAILS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SUCCESSFUL SALES LETTERS

1. REPLIES THAT ARE NOT ORDERS

A sales letter will often elicit a reply of a sort different from that which has been hoped for. It may be in the nature of an objection of some sort to the article offered, or it may be in the form of a request for further information. A reply of either nature is better than no reply at all, and to that extent is to be regarded as gratifying. It is, at least, proof of interest on the part of the writer, and gives one the opportunity of meeting the correspondent squarely on his own ground. It not only means a possible sale, if the objections are successfully met, or if the additional particulars given can be made to carry persuasion, but it tends to show the writer where his own previous letter may have been weak. In other words, replies of this sort serve to give one the other man's point of view in most direct fashion, and are therefore educatively valuable.

Basically, the reply to such a letter must again be a sales letter, but it involves the personal element in much more direct fashion. This time you *know* what your correspondent thinks about the proposition, and your reply is specifically directed to *his* individual objections, or to *his* individual inquiry, where before your letter was based on the supposed point of view of an entire class. You will, therefore, be able to give to the

Your suggestion that the alloy used in the construction of our strainer is subject to electro-reaction and will not, therefore, last long, has been most interesting to us. So important did it seem that we have had our chemical laboratory at work on your idea ever since your letter reached us.

Experiments exhaustively gone into have convinced our chemists that the deposit of salts you describe comes from the feed line, and is not to be attributed to the metal of the strainer.

As you no doubt know, gasoline is now being sold that contains considerable sulphur in solution. This, when coming in contact with the copper feed line, is precipitated as copper sulphate, and is carried into the strainer and collected there. You will probably find that this accounts for the deposit you have described to us.

Won't you examine your sample with this idea in mind and let us know your conclusions? Possibly this will serve to clear up your doubts. If it does, you'll feel like giving us that order for 1,000 you wrote of, won't you?

Our Mr. _____ is planning to be in your city about the first of next month. He will be able to offer you very attractive terms for quantity orders, and hence you will probably find it worth your while to make promptly the examination we suggest above.

In any event, we want to assure you that we value your criticisms, and sincerely thank you for writing us on a subject that needed clearing up.

An example of the "retort courteous" to a customer who has complained that the article offered him is "no good." It subordinates the effort to sell to the effort to get him into the right frame of mind, and to cause him to feel that his "kick" is regarded as the basis of an important laboratory test, rather than as something to be explained away or apologized for. Note, too, how the reply is made from the point of view of the reader—his conclusions and experiences are inquired about.

correspondence from this point on, an atmosphere which is personal and direct, such as was impossible in the original sales letter.

The utmost care must of course be exercised to avoid a tone in your reply that implies superiority of knowledge, or any condescension on your part in tendering an explanation. It must never be even intimated that your correspondent's failure to see things from your point of view is due to his inability to understand the subject, or to grasp the description already given. This might fatally alienate him, and would, at best, tend to make him less open to conviction. On the contrary, he should be thanked for pointing out his objection, and for the opportunity he has given you for reply. He may even be told that, in the light of the objections he has raised, you can see that the mistake lies at your own door, in the poor description you gave in the first instance. He will then be much more ready to accept your explanation, and to permit his misconception to be set right.

The objections that he raises must be discussed in your reply in a thoroughly frank and honest manner, with no room for him to suspect that you are attempting to evade the discussion, or to cover up weak points. The difference between your article and others on the market must be gone into thoroughly; its special adaptability to his needs or his use must be shown in specific terms, with a careful avoidance of all generalities. If the objection is the usual one: "I am told by So-and-So, who has used your device, that it is faulty in such-and-such respect," this opens the door wide to a full comparison, and for the opportunity of showing in an agreeable way that So-and-So's opinion is a mistaken one. The thorough familiarity with the article itself, its

details of manufacture, its potentialities and its achievements, as against others on the market, the wisdom of which was urged in an earlier chapter, will stand you in good stead here.

A simple request for further particulars should, of course, be replied to with the same expression of thanks for the opportunity to be more explicit, as when replying to an objection. It, too, should be regarded as educative, in the sense that it shows you the other man's point of view, and may give you a valuable hint for improving on your technique of description. Here again, you need all the knowledge of your subject that it is possible to acquire.

The main thought to be kept in the foreground in framing replies to either class of letter is that you have an opportunity offered for the exercise of real salesmanship. Your correspondent is probably half "sold" already, even if he does not realize it at the time of writing. He would not have written you if he was not interested. It is therefore "up to you" to make the most of the opportunity he offers you himself—and to "put the sale over."

2. IMPORTANCE OF A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LETTERS

In later chapters we shall pass from the consideration of sales letters to that of other kinds of business letters. But we cannot drop the present subject without urging on the reader the great value of the analysis of his own letters in the light of results, and also of the study of his own letters in comparison with those of others. The particular application that this has to follow-up letters is shown in the early pages of Chapter IV, but its general application will be discussed here.

No successful writer of sales letters would copy the

language of someone else's letters, no matter how effective he might believe them to be. The letters given throughout these pages are in no sense to be regarded as models, in the sense that their exact language is ever to be imitated. It is probable that each one is susceptible of improvement in several ways—and this is true of the general run of all sales letters. But they serve to *illustrate* methods, style, sequences, arguments. They should also serve to *suggest* ideas to the thoughtful writer, but they should never serve as copy.

Thus, if you are seriously trying to improve the effectiveness of your own sales letters, you will continually be on the look-out for those written by others. You will analyze their methods, and compare them with your own. You will gather from them, as from the examples given in these pages, hints for use by yourself—but you will not, if you are wise, copy or imitate them. There are two good reasons for this warning. First, there are almost always small circumstances connected with your own ease that differ from those connected with the ease of the other writer. A slavish imitation, therefore, is almost certain to be weak in its application to your own ease. It will certainly lack the individual features with which you must impress your own letter. Thus you will be the loser in results, as all imitators are, in the end. And, secondly, to imitate is to deaden initiative and to destroy the ability to write independently and effectively when you have no model to follow.

It is quite otherwise if you regard the sales letters of others as fit subjects for *comparative study*, from which you may draw valuable lessons concerning both what is good in them and what is weak in them. This sort of study and comparison ought to be carried on unremittingly, and whenever the opportunity offers.

Of equal importance is the study of your own sales letters in the light of the results that they bring. Some of them will prove successful; many of them will not bring you the results which you hope for and think you have reason to expect. The results of each sales letter should be tabulated. If they are satisfactory, you should seek to place your finger on those features in your letter which served to make it a success. You may possibly have written a forceful and convincing letter more through good fortune than anything else; you may have evolved it carefully and deliberately in the light of the principles you have learned. In either case it should be analyzed. Learn what the successful element was—and stick a pin in it! But be very sure that no matter how successful a given letter may seem to have been, it is certain that *it might have been still more successful*. This is said, not in order to discourage, but to furnish the stimulus for continual analysis and continual striving after improvement. Results grow as experience increases.

Pursue the same methods with your unsuccessful letters. Examine them critically. What did similar letters, written by others, contain that yours did not contain? *What would you write now, as compared with what you wrote then?* Be frank with yourself and dig out the points on which you were weak; face them; and so shape your next effort as to avoid the same mistakes and to improve on the former weaknesses. Thus results that might otherwise be a source of discouragement can be made a stimulus for improvement of method and may prepare for future successes.

Real, pulling, successful letters will soon follow from such work. You may be assured of it! This is, in fact, the only certain road to success.

3. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL VALUE OF STYLE

We cannot leave the subject of sales letters without a final insistence on the value of correctness in grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc., in letters.

Aside from the consideration that self-respect requires the author of a letter to insist on its being free from errors before he signs it, there is another and highly important consideration which makes correctness in these details a matter to be insisted on. The flat statement that sales are often lost through sending out badly spelled letters or letters that are poorly punctuated may seem startling and even exaggerated. It is, nevertheless, only too often literally true.

As we have seen, the primary object in a sales letter is to arrest the attention and to hold the interest of the reader. Poor grammar or long and involved sentences make it difficult, of course, for the reader to follow without mental exertion the writer's line of thought. The reader's attention is thus diverted from the subject in his effort to understand the language. Psychologically the same result follows bad spelling or bad punctuation. Small mistakes of this nature begin their evil effect by making a bad impression on the mind. The mind is arrested in its operation of following the argument of the letter to dwell disapprovingly on the minor errors of style. This breaks the train of thought which the writer has aimed to direct in the reader's mind. The reader stops to notice the use of a semicolon where a colon should have been used; he stumbles in his reading when he encounters a comma where a period and the end of the sentence should have been. He shudders mentally over his correspondent's use of phrases that are useless and futile and meaningless. The inevitable result is a division of attention—the reader is thinking of the errors

he has encountered, when his whole attention should be on the subject of the letter.

The attention of the reader must be caught—this we have seen in the foregoing pages. It must be held also—and it is obvious that holding it is impossible if distractions of any kind are allowed to creep in. Errors such as those we have referred to are distractions—and offensive distractions, whose consequences are much greater than the errors would appear to deserve. Divided and weakened attention is too serious a handicap to risk through want of care on the part of the writer. Why incur such risk, when a little care for such matters will avoid it altogether?

Equally destructive of attention—or, perhaps it were better to say, wholly incapable of arousing attention—are the futile, vapid phrases so often used by writers of business letters as a result of an unthinking habit. One of the first habits to be cultivated by anyone who would make his letters original and “pulling” is the avoidance of the use of stilted and formal phrases. Some of these are listed below.

For a general discussion of good English in business writing and for immediate aid in puzzling questions of grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and the uses and meanings of words, the reader should consult the volume entitled *Better Business English*, in this series.

4. FUTILE PHRASES

Whatever the nature of your letter, avoid the use of language of this sort:

We are enclosing *here-with*

The “herewith” and the “hereto” are redundant, unnecessary, and

*Please find attached
hereto*

Enclosed please find

stilted. You would not use them in conversation.

What does "please find" mean? This phrase, also, would sound ridiculous to you if someone used it in speaking to you.

The simple, natural expressions would be: "We enclose a circular," etc., and "You will find a sample attached."

*Hoping to receive your
valued order*

*Thanking you in ad-
vance*

Awaiting your reply

Aside from the utter uselessness and futility of such phrases, a letter should never close with a sentence beginning with a participle. If you must say something of the sort conveyed by these phrases, translate them into something like this: "We assure you that we shall take pleasure in seeing that your order is given the most careful and prompt attention;" "For whatever you may be willing to do for us we shall be very grateful;" "Your reply will be awaited with much interest;" "We shall do our very best to please you."

*Agreeable to your re-
quest*

*Pursuant to your re-
quest*

*Conformable to your re-
quest*

As per your request

These, again, are monstrosities of language which no sane salesman would ever think of using in conversation. Substitute: "We are sending you the catalogue you asked for;" "We have examined our books as you suggested we should do;" "It has been a pleasure to us to comply with your request that we should," etc.

In reply to same
The material for same
Notice if same is what
you need

This word ought to be regarded as the outlaw of business correspondence. It should never be used under any circumstances,

and can almost always be dispensed with without a substitute: "In reply;" "The material for *it*;" "Notice if *it* is what you need."

We *beg* to hand you
We *beg* to acknowledge
We *beg* to say
We *beg* to advise

These are more of the archaic phrases that are used in business correspondence but that are the reverse of business-like. Such language, if analyzed, is found to imply servility, and in a letter is not only out of place but does not express the facts. You *hand* your correspondent nothing by means of a letter. And if you "beg," you most certainly won't sell, or even be accorded the right to treat with him as an equal. Say: "We enclose;" "We send you," etc.

We *beg* to remain

"We remain, yours truly," is an archaic survival of an utterly out-of-date attempt at polite formality for which modern business would have nothing but contempt if judgment had not been dulled by habit. Why, then, "beg to remain" when nothing of the kind is really meant? Present-day good sense dispenses even with the "we are," and sanctions the curtailed close: "Yours truly," "Very truly yours," etc., without any prefatory language.

The *above* will make it
clear
In pursuance of the
above
The *above* statement

Although there is no such thing in the English language as "above" in the sense of a noun or of an adjective, this glaring error of grammar is more commonly committed in letters than any other. Grammatical English requires: "The foregoing will make

it clear;" "In pursuance of what appears above;" "The foregoing (or preceding) statement," etc.

We have your favor,
contents of which
have been *carefully
noted*

This is nonsense. You would not be writing if you had not "noted" the contents of the letter. But what is done when "contents are noted," anyway? Omit the entire statement, and the letter is as good as it can possibly be with it—and far less tiresome.

We *would state*
We *beg to advise*

Why not say what you have to "state" without this unnecessary preamble? To "advise" when you actually are making a statement is an absurdity.

As per

How this mongrel phrase crept into business phraseology is as difficult to explain as the phrase itself is to defend. It is not only bad English, but bad form as well. Change such sentences as "We wrote you *as per* copy herewith" to something like: "Please refer to our letter of _____, a copy of which is attached." Whatever you choose to write in its place, be careful never to use this phrase under any circumstances.

Your *esteemed favor*

Why is a business letter a "favor"? And who would term it "esteemed" if speaking of a letter in conversation? The phrase suggests insincerity—for it is never meant in its real significance. If it is necessary or advisable to express appreciation, why not do so in honest twentieth-century language, such, for example, as: "Your letter gave us much pleasure," or, "We are greatly pleased to learn from your letter," etc.?

Thanking you *in advance*

Aside from beginning with a participle, which is bad form, the "thank you in advance" is an absurdity. Thanks can be tendered only *after* the act. Actually this phrase is no more than a notification that you do not intend to take the trouble to thank your correspondent properly. It is both absurd and, what is worse, discourteous. Say: "I shall be greatly obliged," etc.

CHAPTER IV

FOLLOW-UP LETTERS

It cannot be expected, of course, that the entire list of persons to whom a sales letter may be sent will respond with orders or purchases. Indeed, there are some lines of business in which, if five to ten per cent of such affirmative returns are secured, the result is considered highly satisfactory. If those who do not respond to the first letter are nevertheless regarded as live prospects, such as would warrant further effort, they will, of course, be given one or more follow-up letters in the hope that they may yet be induced to send in their orders.

Again, notwithstanding what was said in Chapter II regarding the propriety of writing letters several pages long, the nature of the article to be offered or the class of prospective buyers or some other consideration may induce the decision to carry on an educational campaign along with the sales effort. Hence it becomes necessary to plan a series of letters to accomplish this. These, too, are follow-up letters. They necessitate separate consideration from the class of follow-up letters first mentioned.

1. FOLLOW-UPS TO ORIGINAL SALES LETTERS

Of the class of follow-up sales letters mentioned in the first paragraph above, i. e., those which are sent out because the first has evoked no response, something

more has to be added to what has been said at length on original sales letters in the preceding chapters. No matter whether one or several efforts are made to induce a prospect, who has failed to reply, to become a buyer, each follow-up letter must be a complete sales letter in itself, differing each time from its predecessors, perhaps, in language and arguments, but constructed on the scientific lines of original sales letters, such as we have already discussed. Of course an effort should be made in each new letter to present the subject with as much novelty of form and argument as possible, on the theory that if the reader was not interested by the first presentation, he may be interested by having the subject put before him from some other point of view. And since such a sales effort will rarely be pursued beyond two or three follow-up letters, each one must be a complete sales letter in itself, because as each one is sent out, it is with the hope that the purpose will be accomplished, and that no succeeding letter will be necessary.

But before a follow-up is written to those who have not replied to your original sales letter, a definite investigation and study of the replies that have been received should be carried out. This is as important a step as is the study of the goods and of the prospect, which has been discussed in Chapter I. A little reflection will show the immense importance of endeavoring to learn from the replies (1) what were the features in your sales letter that brought the favorable responses, and (2) on what particular points further effort should be concentrated in order to impress and influence the prospects who have not yet replied. If this is possible, you gain, not only the additional business which results from additional orders, but also that most valuable information—how to improve your own methods of attack, and

Gentlemen:

We know prices are low,

BUT

HAVE

YOU

SEEN

OURS?

Very truly yours,

A rather unusual sales letter. Its brevity leaves everything to the imagination. But it is calculated to awaken interest in, and a desire for the price list—and that is all that is aimed at by the letter. To one who writes for the price list the real sales letter would be written, in the nature of a follow-up. It has the merit of being an excellent means of discovering who are "live prospects."

how best to overcome the resistance that has, so far, stood in the way of making a sale.

By far the greater number of orders received in response to a sales letter do not disclose information of this sort. Here and there, however, will be found a hint. A correspondent will write, perhaps: "If your Telephone Arm will really serve two desks, as you say it will, you may send me one." Here you gain a lead that shows you which one of the selling points impressed that particular customer. Perhaps if you strengthen this particular argument in your follow-ups, it will impress others who overlooked it because it was not sufficiently strong or explicit, or because you did not expand sufficiently on this particular point.

This is illustrative of what may be done, and shows what may be gathered here and there from replies that will serve you as a sort of ammunition for use upon those prospects who have to be followed up with additional sales arguments.

But the chief function of the follow-up sales letter lies in the fact that a very large number of prospects fail to respond to the first sales letter through sheer inertia. The letter itself may be all that it should be, up to the point of actually creating desire; but it stops short, perhaps, of communicating to the prospect the necessary starting power which results in buying action. This inertia on the part of the prospect has to be overcome by subsequent letters that will prod him into action. This means that the subject must be presented in a different manner in each new letter sent. Fundamentally, such follow-up letters must hammer away at the chief selling points, until the prospect gives free rein to his desire and takes the necessary buying action. Here is where the effectiveness of suggestive descrip-

tion (discussed on pp. 18, 38, 39,) will prove itself. While each letter in the sequence must be a complete sales letter in itself, each one will be novel in form, always using *new phrasing* when repeating anything that has been said before. The goods offered may be described in each letter by suggestive phrases of the class illustrated on p. 39.

Along with the realization of the value of suggestive description, it must always be borne in mind that there is, for many persons, real suggestive power in mere repetition—not, perhaps of words, but of ideas. Thus the writer of sales letter should never feel discouraged over those prospects who fail to respond to one letter. For it is certain that among those who do not respond there are yet many who will do so if some force sufficient to overcome their inertia can be injected into the follow-up letter. With some this is to be achieved by repetition, with others by new arguments or new persuasion. The chances are all in favor of results if repetition of ideas, clothed in new language, is skilfully used. Hence the wisdom and even the necessity of follow-ups to original sales letters.

2. FOLLOW-UPS TO INQUIRIES

Then there is the following up of an inquiry to which you have replied, but which has not resulted in any action on the part of the person sending in the original inquiry. Great care should be taken in such letters to avoid any appearance of complaining that your prospect has not replied to your first letter. To recapitulate your correspondent's apparent shortcomings and your own grievances by writing, for example: "You wrote us for prices on _____ and we replied on _____. Again on _____ we wrote you once more, repeating

our offer, and asking for a reply. So far you have not seen fit to favor us with a reply," is the common method of the unthinking letter-writer. But it is the worst sort of policy, and does not accomplish its object. It is not even calculated to induce your correspondent to reply; and if it does bring an answer, that answer is not likely to be an order.

If your reply to his original inquiry has brought no results, if, in other words, he has failed to give you an order although he made the first move, by inquiring about your product, the fault may lie with you. The chances are that your own reply may not have been a suitable sales letter—it may have lacked some elements that it needed, in order to induce him to buy. In any case, he has apparently lost interest, and if you are wise, you will carefully examine your own reply with a view to finding out whether you fell short in your own salesmanship. The fact that several days will have elapsed since you wrote it will make it easier for you to examine your own letter critically. It is more than likely that you will find that you yourself are the cause of your correspondent's failure to "come back." Here is your opportunity, not only to detect some of your own weaknesses in writing sales letters, but to improve on your own technique there and then by writing such a follow-up letter as will actually turn your indifferent prospect into a customer—or, at least, as will make him reply to you.

One does, of course, encounter people who write inquiries for the fun of the thing, with no real interest in the goods they inquire about. Freakish cases such as these constitute a certain percentage of the correspondence of any business house. But it is a small percentage, at most, and should not be allowed to have

No. 1

You would not, of course, have inquired about our line of repulsion-induction motors unless you had felt an interest in them.

Perhaps in our reply, we were at fault in not showing you clearly enough that this type of motor is physically interchangeable with our single-phase motors of the split-phase design, as well as with our direct-current motors of similar horse-power, rating, and speed specifications.

You will readily appreciate the advantage and the economy of this feature. It allows you to equip your machines with motors to suit any local power requirements, without any change whatever in the standard dimensions of your machines.

Isn't this feature alone enough to commend our line to you?

Samples will cheerfully be sent you for the asking--and without putting you under any obligation whatever.

May we send them?

This letter, as well as Nos. 2 and 3 following, suggest the kind of tone to use in following up an inquiry received from a prospect who has failed to act on the reply sent to his inquiry.

No. 2

The advantage of immediate delivery of _____ that we were able to offer you in reply to your inquiry of _____ ought not to escape your interested attention.

It seems probable that our letter must have failed to reach you, and so we are now sending you a copy of it along with this.

The market is undoubtedly in for a continued rise for some time to come, and you could not consult your own interest better than by securing supplies for which there is a big demand at present. They may not be procurable at all, if you wait too long.

May we send you a shipment?

This is merely a suggestion for a follow-up where the prospect made the first move by writing to inquire for prices, etc.

No. 3

Probably the holidays have interfered to prevent your replying to our offer of _____

It has occurred to us, too, that possibly the price we quoted may have seemed high to you. If so, this is a good opportunity for us to point out that when you are buying motors, the price you pay is a very good index of the quality you are getting.

Then again, when you are in the market for motors, it is not simply a question of equipping yourself for a few weeks, but for years ahead. But if you get cheap motors, you are not equipped for long--trouble lies close ahead!

On the other hand, with the _____ motors, you are insured against breakdown, against weakness, against interruption of service, for in buying them you are buying service of a lasting sort. Our guarantee is back of this.

If you see the matter from this angle, you will recognize that our prices mean high quality--which can never be cheap.

We can give you immediate shipment. May we have your order?

Another suggestion of how to write when attempting to revive the interest of a prospect who has written an inquiry but seems to have lost interest.

any effect on the studious care that ought to be exercised in seeking to make your follow-up letter accomplish what your reply-letter failed to do in the first instance.

There is an old saying that is distinctly applicable to a case of this sort: "If you don't catch any fish, change your bait." If your first letter (your reply to the prospect's inquiry) does not elicit a response of some sort—change your bait! Perhaps your description was not of the sort to interest him. Figure out one that is different. It may turn the trick! Or, if you gave him a really adequate description in the first place, lay the stress this time on how the goods will serve *him* personally—on the advantage, the satisfaction, the labor-saving or time-saving that *he* will enjoy from their purchase and use. In other words, you must dangle before him some fresh bait. This time, it may be, it should consist of more forceful persuasion, such as we have discussed on pp. 55-60.

But as we said just above, don't write as if you had a grievance on account of his failing to act on your first letter. Let your follow-up open with the fullest friendliness, somewhat on the line of the example shown on the next page and of those on pp. 89-91. These are offered, of course, merely as suggestions of the many ways that are available for intimating, without directly saying so, that you feel a reply of some sort is due you.

3. ORIGINAL FOLLOW-UP CAMPAIGNS

But a regular series of follow-up letters that is planned in advance as constituting a definite and complete series in itself, is a very different matter. Here each letter must dovetail with its predecessor, and play its indi-

In all probability you have frequently had the experience of feeling that you had led your prospect well along toward the point where you might hope to consummate a sale, only to have something occur which put a stop to the whole transaction.

In such cases you have no doubt felt that you would very much like to know just what it was that caused the hitch; how matters actually stood; what the chance of eventually getting together really was.

That is the way we feel about you. Our correspondence of a few months ago indicated an excellent possibility of doing business with you. What caused you to lose interest we don't know. Without any "beating around the bush," we should like to ask, How about that order?

Won't you gratify us by writing us about it TODAY?

Very truly yours,

P. S. We have just made up some dandy Art Brass Desk Calendars. We have one for you if you will tell us that you care to have it.

A follow-up sent by a manufacturer to a dealer. While it does not offer any new sales arguments, and is, therefore, open to criticism in this particular, it shrewdly utilizes, by way of opening, an experience that the dealer has himself frequently encountered, and therefore is certain to awaken interest in the reader. Note, too, the manner in which the postscript is used to induce the prospect to write again. If he will ask for the calendar, he can hardly escape from replying to the question in the letter itself.

vidual part in the series as whole. While each letter in the series must be a sales letter, no one letter—except it be possibly the last—will be complete in itself, i. e., each one is a separate link in the chain the information and the persuasion embodied in each.

The initial difficulty to be solved in this class of follow-up letters is more serious and more important than any that will arise in writing the individual letters already discussed. It involves the intelligent determination of the number of letters that shall constitute the chain and a decision regarding the part that each shall play in working out the plan as a whole. If these preliminary questions are met and decided with skill and good judgment, the actual writing of the letters themselves may be said to be a detail of minor importance.

1. *Number of Letters in a Series.*—On what should be the actual number of letters in the chain many persons are to be found who entertain fixed ideas, and who will declare with an assumption of authority that four, five, six, or some other number is definitely the best. Despite this apparent authority, however, it may be declared with considerable assurance that no definite number can be theoretically prescribed as the standard for a series. The circumstances and purpose involved in each case, the nature of the article to be sold and its cost, the extent to which the prospects are likely to need education on the subject, and especially the question of how much of this should be embodied in each letter, are conditions that vary with each case and necessitate a decision to fit each case. Two letters might be all that would be justified in a campaign to sell cheap novelties, while a dozen probably would prove scarcely sufficient in a colonization project involving the sale and reclamation of land in a remote locality.

It's up to you!

Instead of that gang of engineers wearing out the back of their heels and my furniture, they are showing greater wear and tear on the bottom of their shoe soles.

At the same time that I wrote you, I also sent out a similar S. O. S. to some other manufacturers.

Almost every one of them wrote or wired for one of the boys, and they have been hot-footing it ever since. And from all the reports I received from establishments where they called, they have proved of the greatest value to those who sent for them.

As I don't want them hanging around this office on their return, I am wondering if you are now ready for them to drop in and go over your blue prints with you.

They won't sell you--they don't know how, and they won't try--but they will help you, as they know the foundry game from A to Z, and they may have some suggestions for cutting down your costs.

You won't be obliged to me--it will be just the reverse, I assure you.

Shall I send you one of them? _____

For whom shall he ask? _____

Appreciatively yours,

A second letter in a follow-up series. This letter was signed by the president of the concern, and was sent to the executive in charge of the department that it was desired to reach. It is a good example of a good will builder, while being also a fine illustration of a sales letter designed to sell service, which later on brings business. Note also the subtle idea involved in the blanks, which implies the expectation of a reply on the letter sheet itself.

Underwear doesn't lie, or misrepresent itself.

Suppose we put some of our special brand of underwear in your hands, without expense to you, for examination. You understand underwear, and you can't be fooled if you examine it yourself.

You will see that it is the best quality in each different weight that you ever sold--and you can make a profit of at least 60 per cent on it.

How would you like to learn the details of our proposition?

Don't bother to write us a letter. Just write across this one: "I am interested." Then put it in the enclosed envelope and mail it today. We'll do the rest.

An example of the first letter in a series of follow-ups. If it fails to elicit a reply, a couple of letters can then be sent describing the goods, another one setting forth the proposition on which they are offered, a fourth on the profits obtainable, the last one in the series being the "clincher," designed to force action. The merit of this letter lies in the consideration of the subject from the point of view of the prospect alone.

For a follow-up campaign involving more than two or three letters a serious and comprehensive study is necessary of the subject itself and of the prospective purchasers. Let us suppose, for example, that a colonization scheme is about to be undertaken among American farmers, involving the idea of selling them land in the Canadian Northwest, and of arranging for their migration and settlement there. Preliminary work would involve a classification of the individuals to be written to, in accordance with the prices prevailing in their several localities for agricultural land and a comparison of those prices with the prices involved in the project itself. It would involve, further, details more or less specific, of the agricultural possibilities of the land to be sold, showing what crops were suitable, the crop yield, etc.; details of markets available, and prices prevailing there for produce; figures on rainfall, sunshine, and temperatures; particulars regarding neighborhood communities, etc., and a multitude of other details which would appeal to farmers. The question of how many letters should constitute such a series is one to be determined by assembling all the information intended to be conveyed to the prospects and by dividing it off into "balanced rations," such as would serve with each letter to whet the appetite for more, and make a consecutively interesting story out of the whole—a gradually culminating educative course, as it were. Nevertheless, each letter in such a series should invite action by the prospect. Although the series is cumulative, each letter in the series should be a complete sales letter, urging the prospect to buy. And each such campaign must be planned on the theory that a certain number of the prospects written to will buy after the first, after the second, and after each subsequent letter

in the series. If they don't, your whole plan probably had something wrong about it.

On the other hand, an attempt to introduce a new brand of soap to the market would probably be limited to two or at most three letters, culminating possibly in the offer of a premium or other inducement for patronizing the neighborhood grocer with an introductory order.

Thus the question of the number of letters to be relied on resolves itself into a determination of how much educational work must be done, and the extent to which each individual letter in the series shall contribute to it. The final letter in the series must be the one with the strongest selling appeal, since it is the "last chance" to influence the prospect. But its appeal will differ only in degree from those that have preceded it.

2. *Time Between Letters.*—The question of the time between the letters is an important one, and the answer to this depends again a good deal on the class of prospect involved and the nature of the article offered. In a general way, it may be said that when educative work is involved, as in the land colonization scheme just mentioned, ten days' interval between letters is none too long. But where the appeal is made to the bargain instinct, or to the gratification of vanity, taste, etc., two or three days is a wiser interval. But in every case care must be taken to give to the prospect time to reply before the next letter in the series is dispatched. Since no risk ought ever to be taken that a follow-up letter may cross a reply to an earlier one in the series, allowance must be made for the distance the letter has to travel as well as for the presumable habits of the prospect in respect to correspondence. This may, of course, necessitate the application of a different time rule to

My good-natured, hard-working partner, Hill Igelback, just told me this:

"Ed, there's several hundred good folks we've never met in this neighborhood who own motor cars--they've never honored us with their patronage. I wonder why? We tried hard to make a friend of everyone with whom we came in contact. Perhaps they are not familiar with our service."

Frankly, it rather puzzled me, so I said: "Hill, if you're willing, I'll write a letter to everyone that the list shows we haven't met, and tell them just what we're trying to accomplish."

So here it is.

You're getting battery service at some time, somewhere, aren't you? Is it satisfactory? Does the battery man really appreciate your patronage? Does he show you the little courtesies that make you feel he's sincerely interested in you and your car?

Hill and myself are ambitious fellows. We're trying hard to carve a place for ourselves in the business world. We want to be right here for years to come, and we'd like to meet you now.

We want you to feel that our interest doesn't center around your pocket-book. It's a fact that "he who serves best profits most in the long run."

Won't you stop in today? We'll bear acquaintance. You'll find a warmth of feeling and a spirit of sincere service that most folks say is unusual in the motor car game.

Sincerely yours,

P. S. Your Willard, Vesta, Presto, any battery that you have--drop in with it--our free inspection service will better its performance for you.

A type of friendly "starter," or opening letter in a follow-up series which was planned in a campaign to attract patronage in a motor-car battery service. Its conversational and persuasive tone is worth noting.

different sections canvassed, and especially to the habits of the class of prospects written to; and the plan of campaign must arrange for giving to this detail full consideration.

3. *When Printed Matter Is Enclosed.*—Extensive follow-up campaigns will often involve sending printed matter with some or all of the letters in the series. The printed matter may be general in its nature, such as a stock circular; or there may be a series of printed documents, prepared to accompany the letters of the series, and describing the different features of the proposition. It is then a question of the relation that the letters in the series should bear to the printed matter, and what part each should play in carrying the sales argument to the prospect.

The general rule to be followed is that the printed matter should contain all the information, the details, the facts, the description. The letters should address themselves to persuasive argument, seeking to interest the prospect in the information which is to be derived from the accompanying document. It is through the latter that the actual proposal should reach the consciousness of the prospect. The main idea—at least in the early letters of the series—must be to get the prospect interested so that he will be willing to turn to the documents to obtain the details of the sales proposal. If the printed matter is properly prepared, it will contain material calculated to interest him still further, namely, the sales offer or proposal itself, set forth in full detail and in attractive form.

The chief object of the letter, then, is to induce the reading of the accompanying document. The letter has its function in starting the interest which the document will be designed to intensify through description

and persuasion. If the letter should go into the details of the proposal, covering much the same ground as does the document, the printed matter itself will get scant attention.

This must not be taken to imply that it will be sufficient for the letter to urge the prospect, in dull and uninteresting language, to "examine the enclosed circular, which will give all necessary information." Such vagueness will neither interest nor lead to the desired action. Language of this sort repels rather than attracts. There must be some sort of relation between the letter and the printed matter. In other words, the letter must "sell" the idea of reading the printed matter.

If, for example, the campaign is one designed to sell land to farmers on a colonization plan, the voluminous information that must be given would be more effective if presented in printed form, and can be gone into with much greater detail than is desirable in letters. The successive letters in the series would seek to awaken interest in the printed data, as well as in the project itself. An example of how this may be done is given on p. 102. This, you will notice, is apparently not a complete sales letter, in that it does not seek to induce the prospect to buy offhand. Its object is, rather, to induce him to inquire—to show his interest in some affirmative way. The proposition is too big to justify the expectation of selling the prospect at once. Nevertheless, the example given is a sales letter in the sense that it seeks to *sell the idea*. If the prospect can be induced to reply—and he probably will not do this unless he reads the data in the printed matter—he is already half sold. He can then be followed up with letters and information calculated to meet his own particular case, and of a more personal sort than it would be possible to make of the

Do you realize that your investment in Illinois land at \$200 to \$250 per acre is a burden--something of a liability?

A farm of from 100 to 300 acres represents at these prices a capital of from \$20,000 to \$75,000. If this were converted into cash, it would earn you at least 6 per cent without labor or effort. Thus your farm should yield you 6 per cent on its investment value, plus a reasonable additional return for the risk of crop failure, plus what your time and effort and management are worth.

Do you get this much?

Perhaps you have never thought of it in this way?

Now suppose you were able to purchase land just as fertile as your present land, and at \$200 less per acre, and just as close to the railroad and to market. Do you realize that you could earn the same returns on one-third the capital that you now have invested?

If a proposition of this sort sounds good to you, look into it a little further, by reading the enclosed statement of the _____ colonization plans. It won't cost you a cent to read about it, but it will show you that you really can do what we have hinted at. You will find there lots of facts to show you that you can make as good a living as you do now, and with far less capital tied up.

Tonight, when you get home, and after you have read the printed sheet, just write across this letter: "I am interested," and send it to us. We will show you how you can investigate for yourself, without any expense whatever.

Do it tonight!

rest of the series itself, which is planned for those who have not yet replied.

A good rule to observe when addressing a sales letter to business men is to avoid mailing it at such a time as will result in its being delivered on a Saturday or on a Monday. The former is usually a half-day, devoted to clearing up the deferred accumulations of the week, and the latter usually brings with it a large access of new business which absorbs the mind and makes it decidedly unreceptive to most sales propositions. In any case, a sales letter has a better chance of attentive consideration on the other days of the week.

As a final piece of advice, you are urged to practice, and to keep on practicing the principles that we have discussed as applicable to sales letters of every sort. It is comparatively easy to master the rules applicable to sales and business letters generally, so as to know them well in theory. The difficulty comes when one first tries to put them into practice.

You have been urged, for instance, to eliminate the "we" phrases and to substitute the use of "you" sentences. Try this when next you sit down to dictate. It will not come as easily as you may expect after reading about it. To break away from the old vapid, flat forms of expression that you have been accustomed to use in dictation and in writing, and to make your communications over into real sales talks is no easy matter at first, even as it is no easy matter to break away from any established habit. If it were as simple as it seems, there would not be much justification for writing about it at length.

Experience will show you, as was stated in Chapter II, that it is necessary, day after day, to refer back to the principles underlying successful work, and day after

day to fight the temptation to fall back on the old phrases and the old style of letters. But this is what others have gone through, and so must you. Keep this book on your desk; refer to it as you prepare to dictate; get hold of a principle so completely that you can *work with it*. Your letters will soon begin to pull—and the improved results will be a joy to you, and a stimulus to do better still next time.

CHAPTER V

COLLECTION LETTERS

So far, we have given our attention to a discussion of the sales letter in its various forms. We have yet to consider the collection letter.

This differs from the former in that, while the sales letter seeks to persuade a man to buy something *from* you, the collection letter seeks to induce him to give up something *to* you. Fundamentally each necessitates the exercise of the same qualities of salesmanship. The principles enumerated in Chapter I are as applicable to one class of letter as to the other. That is to say, the collection letter, notwithstanding that it embodies a request for money, must endeavor to excite interest, to awaken a wish to settle the debt, to bring about a decision to remit—and to induce the action itself. Technically, therefore, the collection letter must “sell” its subject to the debtor, in bringing him to a lively recognition of the creditor’s rights, and in inducing him to act on that recognition.

Again, as with the sales letter, the collection letter should display the dominant tone of what we have termed the “written conversation.” It is as necessary to impress a collection letter with the personality of the writer as it was shown to be in the case of the sales letter. The “we” element must likewise be subordinated to the “you” element, and the same considerateness

Have you overlooked our account of \$_____,
a statement of which was sent you in September and
October?

Probably you have.

Will you let this be a reminder that it is
now a month overdue, and let us have a remittance,
please?

An example of a friendly first dun in the form of an inquiry.
This can never give offense, and is likely, by its frank friendli-
ness, to evoke a response—probably of explanation, which is
exactly what is desired.

toward the customer's interest and toward his point of view is necessary here as before.

The important difference to be emphasized is, as was intimated above, that here you are demanding something of your correspondent as a matter of right—something which is justly due you—but which is withheld from you. This is your new relation to him—you are his creditor, and he is the delinquent. The skill of the collection letter-writer lies in the method by which he expresses this relationship in pressing his demands. How this should be determined upon we are now to consider.

The dominant thought to be borne in mind in planning the framework of this type of letter is that one appeal to the debtor may possibly not produce results. He may have to be pursued with increasing pressure until the last step, i.e., the threat of legal proceedings, is reached. One has, therefore, to have in mind a graduated series of appeal, pressure, demand, and threat, and each successive letter to the same debtor must be planned as one in a progressive series. The question of how many letters should be planned for the series is always a troublesome one, and its answer has been found to depend very materially on the nature of the creditor's business and the class of his customers. A house selling furniture on instalments, for example, has a class of customers very different from those who patronize the wholesale dry goods dealer. The purchaser of furniture on instalment is scarcely regarded as a customer whose future trade can be counted on, and who, in a sense, may be said to form a part of the established trade of the concern; while the merchant who purchases his stock from the wholesaler may reasonably be considered a steady and permanent customer whose requirements are

to be counted on as having to be met at stated seasons in the course of each year. Between these two classes lies a wide gradation of customers who are, of course, susceptible of classification, but who, even if divided into classes, will still require different individual treatment, in case of delinquency.

In the case of the "casual" customer who is delinquent, one or perhaps two collection demands may be considered enough, as a rule, and the severity of each successive demand may be regulated by this consideration.

The steady, permanent customer who unexpectedly falls behind in meeting his regular bills is in another class entirely.

Nevertheless, letters intended for either class must embody a few identical principles. These are:

1. The first demand for payment of an overdue account should be regarded as an attempt to reach a mutual understanding—embodying the old idea that the letter is, as far as it is possible to make it so, a sort of written conversation. If you met your debtor face to face, instead of writing to him, you would first seek to find out *why* he had not paid, and you would endeavor to reach some ground of mutual understanding in as pleasant a manner as possible. This tone should dominate every first letter, when no such understanding exists already.

2. In order to reach such an understanding, the debtor should be asked in appropriate language, what are the special causes of his delinquency, and what his present circumstances are (see sample letter shown on p. 109.) If this is done delicately, perhaps with sympathy, perhaps humorously, it is likely to induce frankness in his reply, if not a hurried remittance—if from no

If we were to step into your office today, should we be welcome? Should we have the pleasure of a hearty handshake, a smile, and a pleasant "how-do-you-do?" We like to think we should, at any rate.

Nevertheless our statement of your account that we have sent you twice already has received no kindly notice from you--in fact, none at all.

We should like our letters to receive the same attention from you that we should hope to receive ourselves, if we were to step into your office. In other words, this is a plea for recognition.

We should like to ask that you sit down and write to us about it, before your name comes back to our mind. You need not mention your account unless you want to. But, to be frank, we really should like to have a few friendly lines, telling us how you are situated. May we?

An example of the friendly letter, which seeks to elicit information on which to judge of future procedure. It may seem to have too much of the "we" element, but it serves to impress the reader with the friendliness of the creditor concern.

other motive than to preserve the good will you show you entertain for him, and perhaps also in order to show that he needs neither sympathy nor special consideration.

3. Accommodation of the customer—"service"—should be as much the stock in trade of the wise and far-seeing merchant as is his actual stock of goods. This word "service" can be made as comprehensive as the individual business man wishes to make it. But it is elementary to regard it as covering the giving of satisfaction to the customer—and keeping him satisfied. Therefore it is the part of wisdom so to frame the first letter in pursuing a delinquent debtor as to find out whether he has any grounds of complaint, whether he needs accommodation, whether he has noted, indeed, that his account is overdue, and, generally, what are the circumstances surrounding his case.

Thus the first letter will usually be in the nature of a "feeler," which will probably elicit—affirmatively, by a reply, or negatively, by his silence—some idea regarding the delinquent, on which the next step may be based. Under ordinary circumstances it will be found extremely wise to frame the first letter on these principles. As was hinted just above, the customer's point of view is the important thing; and a shrewd appraisal of his side of the case will furnish the necessary equipment for a decision as to the tone of such subsequent letters as may be necessary. This may often be easily obtained by making the last paragraph in the letter consist of a friendly inquiry about the condition of the customer's business, a cordial intimation that his patronage is valued, and perhaps even an interesting reference to a new line of goods which you tell him you would like him to have, and in which you think he will be interested.

Cordiality is an element that at this stage should never be absent from the letter.

The "first letter" idea is, after all, merely common sense, as well as good business. Harshness shown to the wrong individual or at the wrong time is poor business indeed, and the first letter of which we have spoken tends to procure information on which to judge intelligently. And it should be borne in mind that the country merchant, particularly, is not especially well grounded in business, and if he is slow pay, this is no indication of dishonesty but more probably of slow collections at his end. A harsh collection letter will alienate him, although you may have already spent time and money in sending salesmen to get his trade in the first instance.

The best safeguard against a false step at the outset in a situation of this kind is, once again, to visualize yourself as talking to your debtor, and to let your letters be the outcome of such a visualization. Your decision and your language will be more nearly *you*.

If subsequent letters are necessary, they will fall somewhere between the extremes of the classes which we have illustrated above by the reference to the customer of the furniture instalment house and the customer of the wholesale dry goods house.

1. *Commercial Accounts*.—For our present purposes this term may be taken to cover all ordinary *business* indebtedness, as distinguished from "retail" indebtedness and from that incurred on the "instalment basis." It is in dealing with this class that the elements of salesmanship really come into play.

Here the customer is, presumably, a regular one—a merchant or dealer—and he is to be regarded as a part of the assets of your business. To preserve his good will, therefore, while reminding him of his obligation to

you, should be the controlling idea. On the other hand, you are asking nothing of him but what it is your right to have. And the preservation of the delicate balance between your rights, on the one hand, and, on the other, the customer's good will, perhaps also his very ability to survive in business, is a difficult proceeding, depending so greatly on circumstances that it calls for the exercise of even greater skill than is involved in selling. This will serve to emphasize the need of the "point of contact" element, founded on a knowledge of the facts in each case.

Although you are demanding what is due you, it will never pay to base your demand on the ground that you need the money or that you will be inconvenienced for want of it. Your customer has had value received when he incurred the debt, and the sole ground for you to take is that it is justly due. If you lower your attitude to pleading for the money, you put yourself on your debtor's level, for he very likely needs the money too, or he would not be in arrears! Self-interest will prompt him to erect an excuse out of such a situation by tacitly determining that of the two he is the one who needs it more!

If you stand on your rights, if you refuse to lower your dignity by appealing, if you so frame your demand that your customer is made to feel that you are not bluffing but you mean exactly what you say, there is nevertheless room for showing a cordial interest in his affairs, for evincing a consideration for his difficulties or his temporary embarrassment, that will leave his good will unimpaired. It is important to bear in mind yourself, and to let your customer feel, that the mere fact that he has fallen behind in his payments is not of itself any reason for forfeiting your consideration.

Surely you know that your failure to pay your account, now overdue, works a hardship on us, and seriously impairs your own credit. We cannot afford to do business with you on this sort of basis, and without a more scrupulous regard on your part for your obligations. We must insist on a remittance by return mail, as a failure on your part to settle will embarrass us greatly.

A good example of what NOT to write at any stage of attempting to collect. Notice the unwise claim that the creditor "needs the money." This is a common tone of collection letters, but should be carefully avoided.

Before resort is had to dunning letters, it is of course desirable to effect a settlement in the usual manner, if possible. The sending of statements is, naturally, the first step; when this has failed to bring a remittance in ordinary course, the question becomes a serious one: Shall we dun him or not? Frequently one is forced to the conclusion that a "dunning" collection letter must be sent. There is always one more effort that can be made, intermediate between the regular statement and the dunning letter. This is a rubber stamp or other endorsement to the effect that the account is past due, and that a remittance is requested. The use of a rubber stamp for this purpose makes the request more impersonal, and therefore less likely to irritate.

Analogous to the rubber stamp—perhaps, even, on account of its humorous element—is the affixing of a gummed sticker to the statement, of the nature of the



accompanying illustration. Its object is at once understood by the delinquent customer—and he is frequently induced to take the hint and to act on it because of the entire absence of the element of a formal dun.

Some firms find that it pays to enclose with their monthly statement (after it has been sent once or twice without any payment being made) a printed slip reading somewhat after this fashion:

IMPORTANT

Our terms are thirty days net. We must ask a strict observance of these terms, and payment of our account when due, according to these terms.

At any rate, some step of this kind is worth taking before the serious step of writing real collection letters is resorted to.

Most large wholesale or jobbing houses with a long list of customers are compelled to resort to form letters in effecting collection of overdue accounts. A series of, say, four or as many as six letters is prepared with care and after much experiment, which will, as nearly as possible, be adaptable to every case alike. By "form letter" is not meant the use of blank letters previously written or multigraphed by the score and filled in as each case arises. But as a time saver, a standard or "master" letter can be prepared for each step in the progress of deferred collections, which is copied for use as each case arises. This practice has the disadvantage of lacking the personal element, which is here a most effective means of bringing about results. In large establishments, however, it is frequently impossible to follow any but this routine method.

If the use of form letters can be avoided, it permits a free departure from routine, and the adoption of a special course of action for each special case. The series of four illustrative letters given on pp. 116-19 preserves the personal element in the first, and shows the gradation from cordial considerateness to the final stern demand. The letters are, of course, framed on the assumption that the debtor makes no reply to either. Each letter is *designed* to elicit a reply, and each is calculated, by its gradually increasing remoteness of tone, to have its

No. 1

Your previous regularity in caring for your account with us as it fell due leaves no doubt in our mind that you have a perfectly good explanation for overlooking the current account for \$_____ which is now a little past due. Will you allow this to serve as a reminder of the fact, and be good enough to send us a check to cover the amount.

We are expecting shortly a new and very attractive line of _____ in which you will assuredly be interested. It should be the very thing for your trade, and will afford an opportunity for opening a very profitable line, which will be readily salable. Our Mr. _____ will shortly submit samples to you, and we hope your opinion will agree with ours.

In the meantime, how about sending you some more _____?

With cordial good wishes, we are

Yours very truly,

This sort of cordiality, accompanying an incidental reference to the overdue account, will usually induce a merely careless customer to reciprocate, at least by sending a partial remittance in an effort to "save his face." It leaves the relations between the parties unimpaired. And, further, any sort of reply elicited by such a letter furnishes a basis on which to determine what further steps shall be taken.

No. 2

You know, of course, that your account is now considerably overdue. This is a little surprising, in view of the reminder which we sent you on _____

If there is any reason for this that you think we ought to know, why not be frank and tell us about it? You have our assurance that it will be given consideration.

Your reply will be awaited with interest.

This letter is suitable in the case of a customer whose account is still regarded as desirable. It leaves the door open for a resumption of the former pleasant relations. With customers who are not regarded as valuable, it may be omitted from the series altogether.

No. 3

Since you have failed to reply to either of our previous communications, calling your attention to your past-due account, we are forced to the conclusion that your failure to send us a remittance is not due to an oversight.

We must now insist that you pay the amount due (\$) by .

At this stage, conciliation and salesmanship are worthless. The customer who ignores previous letters is undesirable as a future prospect, and the collection of his account is all that the house is interested in.

No. 4

Your account for \$_____ is, as you know, long past due. You have not only offered us no explanation for this delay in effecting a settlement, but have ignored our three previous communications on the subject.

Unless we receive a remittance by _____ we shall take steps to effect its collection by legal process, without further notice to you.

(Note.—The words "return mail" may be considered appropriate for insertion in the blank, in some cases.)

At this point no recourse remains but to convey the stern threat of enforced collection. The customer is entitled to no further consideration, and the creditor shows this in his tone and language.

effect on the various classes of customers that can be influenced, some by the withdrawal of one's regard, some by veiled threats, some by open threats.

2. *Instalment Collections*.—Assuming that, on a knowledge of the circumstances derived from sending a first letter of the kind just described, it is decided that the instalment debtor's case is to be treated according to routine, one, or perhaps two collection letters will be all that is customary before proceeding to regain possession of the goods (if this is provided for by the terms of sale), or to institute proceedings. What will then be actually the second letter in the series will remind the debtor of the friendly advance made in the first and will stress the fact that he has given no reason for his failure to remit the overdue payments. Insistenee should follow, demanding a remittance by a definite date, with the added statement that the account will not be permitted to remain open after that date. This implied threat, which still leaves the door open, will have its effect in bringing many a slow debtor to time. This class of collection, having usually the security behind it of the right to recover the goods in case of default, requires less diplomacy, and results are more quickly attained, than in the case of the ordinary commercial account or of the unsecured debt.

3. *Retail Accounts*.—With the retail merchant, collections are on a somewhat different footing. Many of his customers are unfamiliar with the rigid promptness with which business men in general meet their obligations. Many of them, especially women, are often inclined to think that a delay of a few weeks is of no consequence, and with some—fortunately very few—the receipt of a reminder is regarded as in the nature of an insult.

Furthermore, the retailer is generally more reluctant

Your agreement to pay \$_____ per month for the series of _____ volumes constituting the series of _____ has not been kept, and for some reason our previous letter to you on the subject has not been replied to.

We understand, of course, that making small remittances is an annoying thing, and that it is natural to put it off from time to time. You have, however, received the full set of volumes, and we have felt full confidence in your good intentions.

As you can readily understand, your account, along with thousands of others, represents a serious matter of business with us, and we are obliged to insist on prompt payments from our patrons, to the extent, even, of taking all necessary measures to compel payment.

Before we take any such steps, however, we are willing to make it worth your while to pay up all arrears and the balance of the account as well. If you will do this, we will send you a handsome map of Europe, showing the newly adjusted boundary lines of the nations, as settled by the Peace Conference. This is a valuable map and is well worth one of the instalments due on your contract.

If you wish to avail yourself of this offer, it will be necessary to act immediately, otherwise we shall assume that it is up to us to proceed to collect from you what is due us.

Simply sign the accompanying order, enclose \$_____, the amount necessary to close your account, and mail at once.

Example of a case where instalments are small, and legal process proportionately expensive. To offer an inducement to settle in full is cheaper. The letter conveys the necessary threat in a form which usually induces a settlement. The wisdom of such an offer is questionable—but it is one that is sometimes made in order to save expense of collection.

than is the jobber or wholesaler to class a customer as undesirable, to the extent of being indifferent as to whether or not his collection efforts will give offense. He is generally much more inclined to leniency and to the subordination of his rights for the time being to the effort to retain the delinquent customer's good will. Accordingly most retailers would feel that the types of collection letters illustrated for wholesalers and jobbers are unsuited to this class of customers. With some reason, therefore, the tone of collection letters for the ordinary retail business differs somewhat from what has been discussed above.

The term "retailer" is a comprehensive one, of course, and includes the great department stores as well as the small store whose trade consists mostly of cash customers. There is, of course, a wide difference between the elaborate provision made by the former to win and retain the good will of customers and the indifference displayed to these features by the smaller outlying store. Notwithstanding these wide differences, the principle governing the frame and form of the collection letter in the retail trade may be considered to be that the retention of the good will of the customer is more important than the strict enforcement of prompt payment. The ordinary customers in the retail stores who buy on credit may usually be classed as follows: (1) those who are slow but sure pay, including the very wealthy as well as those with no financial, but high moral responsibility; (2) those who have every intention of paying, but who have met with temporary misfortune; (3) those who have no intention of paying until forced to do so. Here, then, much more than with mercantile debtors, the moral character, the social standing, and the financial strength of the debtors will have weight in determining the pro-

cedure and the tone of the letters used in seeking to effect collections.

In this branch of business bills are ordinarily rendered once a month, and, in the ordinary course, settlement of the bill is expected monthly. Although, as already stated, rigid promptness is sometimes not to be insisted on, experience has shown that the longer a delinquent customer is allowed to go without a reminder or other, stronger, suggestion that payment is expected, the more indifferent he becomes, and the harder it is to collect from him.

Balancing this fact against any desire that may be felt to placate the customer and to retain his good will, the first step that may well be taken after the bill becomes delinquent is to send a reminder that is purely impersonal, and which, from its nature, is made to appear as a part of the regular routine. This is commonly accomplished by means of a rubber stamp notice affixed to the regular monthly statement, reading after this manner: "This account is PAST DUE. Please remit." The rubber stamp is preferable to a written or typewritten endorsement, as being more impersonal and as least likely to create irritation at this stage.

If this fails, it may be deemed desirable to make use of the personal collector, who calls at the office or at the home with more or less diplomacy. With this method we are not concerned.

The second step by mail should usually be as dignified as the first, but has a little more of the personal element about it. It still assumes that the failure to pay is merely a case of forgetfulness, and this fiction dictates the spirit of the reminder. This step involves attaching to the statement of account a printed or multigraphed blank form, substantially as follows:

Permit us to call your attention to the attached account of \$_____ for the month of _____ which has doubtless escaped your notice. A prompt remittance will be duly appreciated.

Yours very truly,

To make use of this sort of blank form involves less risk of giving offense than if it were sent in the form of a letter. Since it is a blank that has been filled in for the occasion, it is evident to the customer that it is a part of the regular routine and involves no "personal" reflection.

When attempts of this sort fail to produce results, the real "collection letter" must be resorted to. Yet even now, the first attempt may with good reason afford the customer an opportunity to "make good" without a loss of prestige or self-respect. He may be reminded that his credit has been regarded as good, and that while his delay in settling has occasioned no uneasiness, it is up to him to protect his credit; or, again, his sense of justice may be appealed to, provided it is done in a dignified manner. The retailer will generally have a more intimate knowledge of the circumstances of the debtor (or will be in a position to obtain it), than is often the case with the wholesaler or jobber, and hence it will usually be easier for him to adapt each letter to fit the special circumstances of each case.

If, however, the point is finally reached where it becomes necessary to threaten proceedings, it is equally as important here, as with the commercial account, to employ dignifiedly brief yet emphatic language. Letters of the sort illustrated by Nos. 3 and 4, on pp. 118, 119, should be written without excuses or apologetic language. And, if once sent, the threat should be promptly and rigidly lived up to. Information spreads rapidly

For some reason, doubtless an oversight on your part, your check covering your account for \$_____, now already three months overdue, has not reached us.

Your patronage has always been highly appreciated, and your name has been retained on our books with much satisfaction. You will readily appreciate, no doubt, that promptness in meeting one's obligations is the basis of all business relations.

And won't you also agree with us that in justice to yourself as well as to us, you should see to it that this delay does not continue any longer?

Of course, it is easy to understand that oversights such as this occur very easily. Please do not trouble to apologize, for none is necessary.

But won't you send us a check today?

An example of affording the customer an opportunity to "make good" without any sense of having been hounded to it. It appeals to his sense of justice and his regard for his reputation; yet it provides an excuse for the delay and saves the customer from having to offer one.

to the effect that a concern does not go the limit, but merely bluffs when it threatens, and a reputation of this sort is sure to entail serious losses in the end.

CHAPTER VI

ANSWERING COMPLAINT LETTERS

Letters embodying complaints may come from so many sources and result from so many causes that it is somewhat difficult to attempt to lay down many rules regarding the proper *form* of reply. The *content* and the *spirit* of such replies are, however, another matter. Examples given in the course of this chapter should be studied for their tone, rather than for their exact language.

A complaining customer may have a perfectly reasonable ground for his "kick," and on the other hand, it may well prove to be the case that the customer is absolutely unreasonable, and has no legitimate basis for complaint. The complaint may be based on the quality or the asserted unsuitability of the goods; it may be founded on delay in delivery, or poor packing, or on any one of a dozen grounds. And, from the point of view of the seller, the reason alleged, whatever it is, may be entirely without merit as a basis for a claim. The seller may even suspect the customer of unfairness—or even of a dishonest desire to obtain some unjustified concession. He may feel that he, himself, rather than the customer, is the injured one. These are all possibilities, and we shall consider them as we proceed.

It is well to remember that customers have a long memory and a tongue, as well. Each of these may be made a valuable asset or a dangerous liability for the

seller, according to circumstances. Moreover, customers are the very foundation of business and of business good will. They are, therefore, to be regarded as the seller's good friends, and, in the main, are to be treated as one would treat a friend.

We shall consider the nature of various complaints later. It is well, however, to recall in advance of this discussion that, no matter what the nature of the complaint, the reply should be dictated on the principle of the "soft answer that turneth away wrath"—and it will be found to pay large and cumulative dividends that will later immeasurably exceed any present loss involved in making concessions. And, no matter what sort of criticism is offered by the customer, he should be made to feel that suggestions and criticisms are *welcomed*, and that it is a pleasure to have them laid before one in a form which permits of their being considered and replied to.

Further, the "confession and avoidance" method of the lawyer—admitting and explaining away—is often extremely efficacious, in that it flatters the self-esteem of the customer. What if his complaint does seem to you to be unjust? You can probably find *some excuse* for *him*, and then proceed to answer his complaint from that standpoint. Even here, the wisdom of taking the point of view of the customer, rather than one's own, will be apparent on consideration. Even here, it will not pay to say brutally that he is wrong and unreasonable. Some sort of concession to his pride will make it easier in the end to urge one's own point of view, and easier, also, for him to accept it.

Before we proceed to an analysis of the different situations involved in business complaints, it may be well to consider what is the legal, as well as the moral, relation

of the buyer and seller, the two parties involved in the complaint.

It should be remembered that the buyer—the man whose letter of complaint is under consideration—has received goods from the seller, and that he has them because he ordered them. This means that the seller has, in good faith, parted with his goods at the request of the buyer, and that if he is not at fault in his share of the transaction, the seller is legally as well as morally entitled to consider the sale as a completed transaction.

It is not often, though, that the situations arising out of complaints can be handled on this basis alone. No matter what the strict legal rights of the seller may be, there are other considerations which overshadow mere rights, and which dictate their subordination to considerations which affect the future. There is a wise business rule that should in most cases be regarded as suspending the legal and moral rights of the seller, and that may be stated thus: "No sale or other business transaction should be considered complete until the customer is fully satisfied with his share in the transaction." As we have shown in the case of collection letters, the customers on one's books represent an asset—are part of the good will of the business—and the retention of their good will results in a sort of continuing investment that brings in continuous returns. The cumulative value of a satisfied customer is something that cannot be estimated. Potentially, he may be counted on to send in new customers sooner or later. In like manner, the potential injury that a dissatisfied customer can cause is incalculable, for he may—and probably will—prejudice or cause the loss to the house of numerous other customers, in the course of time. It is, therefore, good business common-sense to keep legal

rights in the background, and to make the satisfying of the customer the supreme object.

If this, then, is to be the controlling attitude in which one approaches the consideration of letters of complaint, it will not be a difficult matter to realize that very few persons indeed really mean to be unfair, and that, *from the writer's point of view*, there is some basis, of some sort, for most complaints that arise in the conduct of business. The complaint may be founded on a mistaken impression of the writer's, and that can be explained to him in the reply; or it may be founded on a legitimate reason, and such a complaint calls, of course, for an adjustment. If one is predisposed in favor of the *customer's* attitude, and is prepared to make allowances for *his* point of view, complaints can generally be handled in such a manner as to result in an increase of the good will of the house, rather than in friction or dissatisfaction to both sides of the transaction.

Practically every complaint, of course, that results from sales or other transactions involving an order and its execution will be found to require some sort of investigation before it can be acted on or disposed of on its merits. Yet, as we shall see later, some business houses make a practice of allowing complaints or claims growing out of sales, irrespective of whether or not they are themselves at fault. It will be well, therefore, for us to consider the handling of complaints from the point of view of the two distinct policies:

1. Where the seller adopts the fixed policy that the customer is always right, and allows the claim at once.
2. Where the seller investigates complaints, in order first to ascertain the facts underlying them, so as to be able to reach a decision on the merits of each case as to their disposition.

1. WHEN THE CLAIM IS WITHOUT MERIT, BUT IS GRANTED AS A MATTER OF POLICY

Many reputable business houses have one unvarying rule, which is considered as applicable under practically all conditions, and which must control the tone of the reply to practically all complaints. This is the adage that "The customer is always right."

While it is impossible, from the very nature of the case, if this rule is the policy to be followed, to suggest more than a framework for reply letters of this class, there are, nevertheless, certain general principles which should dominate, even when pursuing this extremely liberal policy. It may be difficult to put such a rule into practice; it may be felt that in recognizing the rule one is allowing one's self to be victimized; it may even prove difficult to frame a reply in the face of the fact that the customer may be utterly in the wrong. These things can be done, however, and the experience of those who hold this policy has proved it to be one of the best-paying principles on which to model one's business procedure. And so, if the rule is adopted, one might as well "say it with flowers"—and as graciously as possible!

Suppose, first, a simple case—that of a customer who has placed a quantity order based on a previous inspection of a sample. After the shipment reaches him, he writes to say that as the goods do not now appeal to him, or that as they arrived a day or two later than he expected, he will either keep them if a concession is made in the price, or will ship them back for credit. His attitude is utterly unreasonable and unjustified, and yet there is scarcely one case in a hundred in which it is not policy to reply pleasantly, cheerfully assenting to the return of the goods—not, it will be observed, assent-

ing to the proposed concession in price. There are special cases, of course, involving a special manufacture to fill the specific order in which insistence on compliance with the original arrangement is necessary. But even in such a case—"say it with flowers"!

Or, suppose, next, that the customer has ordered a machine under the mistaken belief that it is adapted to his needs, and that, on trying it out, he finds that it is actually unsuitable. Another sale may be lost in the meantime by the seller, owing to the machine's having been shipped out to the first customer; there may be considerable expense entailed in receiving it back. Yet nothing will ever convince your customer, if he demands it, that it is not your plain duty to permit its return. And a refusal would probably not only leave him with an undying grudge, but result in a propaganda among his acquaintances against the seller—a procedure that might be cumulative in its effects and might result in many an additional and unforeseeable loss of sales to other customers in the future.

The difference between the right and the wrong tone is illustrated by the letter on p. 134 and by that on the opposite page (135). The all-important rule that these letters serve to emphasize is: Don't begin your letter with an argument against the return of the goods, and then wind up with a grudging consent to their return. Be human first of all, and do your arguing after you have shown yourself to be human.

Examine first the letter on p. 135. It is not difficult to realize that as the customer reads on through this letter, he will be likely to grow more and more obstinate in his determination to send back the goods. Instead of winning him over to a decision to retain them, the very fact that the seller *argues* against the customer's

position and does so in an aggrieved tone, serves to alienate the customer still more. Telling a man that he is unreasonable is not convincing—it is irritating. The unwilling consent granted at the end either is an implied admission on the part of the writer that he ought really to agree to take back the shipment, or else it is an impolite and belated effort to win the customer's good will after having first tried to shame him into withdrawing his demands.

Turn next to the first letter, and note that the entire discussion is in reverse order, as compared with the second letter. At the very outset the customer is won over by being told that *his* rights, *his* advantage, are uppermost in the mind of the seller. At once the customer is made to realize that here he is dealing with a house that will "do the square thing." Unconsciously he is at least wavering by now, so that as he reads farther he is in a frame of mind that tends to make him disposed to listen to the mild argument that follows, particularly if, as here, the argument is framed to show him where *his* advantage lies, and does not harp on the rights of the seller. And the concession that is offered him in connection with the new bill of goods which is suggested and which he can sell in connection with the earlier shipment, is calculated to persuade him to decide to retain the very goods he earlier wanted to return, *and to place an additional order as well*. In a large proportion of the cases where the right kind of letter is written, the goods won't have to be taken back, even though the customer is told to send them back in accordance with his wishes.

The contrast here, then, is between a letter that accomplishes nothing in the way of persuasion, and serves only to irritate an already discontented customer, and a

So you are not altogether satisfied with those dresses!

By all means send them back, if you don't like them. We are not in business to unload undesirable or undesired goods on our friends, and if they don't please you, we'd rather have them back than not.

Are you altogether sure, though, that they would not make a dandy bargain line for a "sale"? You know, we quoted you an extremely low figure on these, and you can afford to sell them 'way below regular prices and yet make an unusual profit. And they'll sell, too--no doubt about it. In our opinion, you are really passing up a good thing.

Think this over. You might do much worse than keep this line. But it's up to you, of course, for we are absolutely ready to take them back.

Take a look at the sample of _____ and of _____ that we are enclosing. Wouldn't they make a pretty good line to sell along with the dresses? If you decide to keep the latter, we shall be glad to bill you these _____ at ninety days, and you could easily sell the whole shipment in that time.

Just tell us what you prefer, and we'll be perfectly satisfied, either way.

Compare this with the letter on the opposite page. Note the friendly agreement at the very beginning, with the customer's point of view, and the way in which his interest is sought to be aroused by means of a counter-proposition. This is calculated not only to make him willing to forego his intention of returning the goods, but even to place another order for more! Thus a "human" letter can make a friend instead of an enemy, and also tend to turn into a profitable transaction one that bids fair to entail a loss.

We have your valued favor of September 9, complaining about the recent shipment of _____ from us, and declaring your intention to return them.

These dresses were sold you at a figure 'way below the market, and of course, under the circumstances, you cannot expect them to be above all criticism. We sold you a bargain, however, because you can very readily sell them at a good profit.

They are excellent quality and entirely up-to-date, and if they are a little off-color, as you state, it is not a defect that is noticeable, or likely to injure your trade.

So much time has elapsed since shipment that it is a little unreasonable of you to expect us to take them back. When we sell a bill of goods, we expect it to stay sold. How else could we do business? And as they are easily salable, we don't understand the need for the concession you ask.

However, if you feel we ought to take them back, we'll agree to it. You are hereby authorized to return them.

A good example of "how not to do it." Such a letter could only make the customer more determined than ever to return the goods, and is more likely to make him feel permanently sore over the grudging manner in which assent is given to his proposal. Compare this with the friendly attitude expressed in the letter on the opposite page.

letter that instantly and cheerfully grants the customer's request but couples the action with a politic argument and a subtle suggestion that is likely to make the customer abandon his first intention, keep the goods, and order more besides. It is the difference between alienating the good will and support of a customer through the ill-advised argument that he is injuring *you*, and the strengthening of the good will of the customer by telling him that you are thinking of *his* interests when you make your decisions.

Few purchasers are able to realize that their purchase is only one of hundreds or of thousands, and that it is perhaps among the most insignificant of the lot. Few are able to realize that a complaint involves an examination of order slips, correspondence, shipping records, and financial records. Hence, while such an investigation is proceeding, and even if it is given the most prompt attention, a few days may elapse before a reply can be made, based on the merits of the transaction. This delay, if the customer is left in the meantime without any acknowledgment of his claim, is likely to breed impatience and irritation in his mind, which tend to make him less and less inclined to view the matter reasonably, or from any other standpoint than that which his irritation has created. Hence the wisdom of the rule that an acknowledgment of the claim be sent on the same day that the letter is received. It commits the writer to nothing specific, but holds the good will of the customer by persuading him of the good faith of the house he is dealing with. Above all, it prevents his impatience from growing and from warping his own good judgment.

A letter acknowledging the receipt of the claim and promising speedy adjustment on its merits as soon as

Thank you for your letter of the 9th inst., in which you make it quite clear why you think you should not pay our bill in full.

When you ordered the book on "Advertising" from us, you did so on the blank which coupled the offer of the book with a year's subscription to "The Advertiser." The regular price of the book is \$2, but it was offered at 50c in connection with the subscription, as a premium on the latter. We supposed that you understood it that way. Evidently it was not made as clear as we thought we had made it.

Under the circumstances, we are going to ask you to accept the book without further obligation. We are glad to take the same view of the matter as you do, and we assure you that we have no desire to demand any more from you than what you understood to be due at the time of ordering.

Example of a "good will builder." The concession asked by the customer is often unreasonable. But if it is granted, it should be granted in as pleasant a manner as would be shown when accepting an order. All that there is in it for the seller is the good will it creates.

these are ascertained, written in the tone of the example given on p. 139, is, after all, no more than ordinary courtesy. Yet it contributes immensely to convincing the customer that his interests are not ignored—which, on the other hand, is the inference he draws from a failure to acknowledge, followed by a lapse of several days, however natural and necessary the latter may be.

2. WHERE COMPLAINTS ARE INVESTIGATED BEFORE ACTION IS TAKEN

Investigation will usually require more or less time, of course. The rule, however, that the complaint should be acknowledged on the same day on which it is received should be inexorably followed. It must be remembered that, from the customer's standpoint, his purchase, and consequently his complaint, is the sole transaction of any importance.

The principles which should govern the granting of the claim as a whole are equally applicable, of course, to cases where it is considered wise to make a partial concession, on the same ground of policy that, in another case, dictates the granting of the entire claim. If there is to be any concession at all, let it be made cheerfully and not grudgingly or as an act of charity. A letter such as that on the next page is certain to create a good impression on the mind of the recipient, and while the concession may involve a slight present loss, the "publicity" and good will that it will earn are well worth the sum involved—indeed, could seldom if ever be purchased for such a sum through direct advertising.

Investigation of a claim on its merits before taking action on the customer's complaint will usually result in developing one of the following four situations:

Your letter of July 8, calling our attention to an overcharge of \$21.95 in the statement of your account for June arrived this morning. It is a matter of great regret to us that you should have been subjected to any inconvenience through any act of ours, and we are investigating the matter with all possible promptness.

You will understand, we hope, that the item involves a search through a good many charging slips and records, and we hope that you will indulge us for a few days until this can be effected.

You may rest assured that any error on our part will be promptly corrected as soon as we are in possession of the facts.

Letter acknowledging receipt of claim, promising no more than an adjustment on the merits, but tending to keep the customer satisfied, pending the necessary examination into the facts.

1. The fault is found actually to be with the seller, and the customer's complaint is well founded.
2. The seller is found to be free from blame, but some third party, such as the railroad or express company, is at fault.
3. The fault lies partly with the seller and partly with the customer.
4. The complaint is based on a misunderstanding regarding the goods on the part of the customer.

1. *Where the Claim Is Granted Because the Seller Is in the Wrong.*—Thus far, we have considered cases where the complaint is settled on the basis of a concession made from motives of policy, although the claim may possess little or no merit in itself.

There arise, of course, many cases where the customer is actually in the right, and where he is entitled to adjustment as a matter of mere justice. Here the position to be taken by the seller is not one about which there can be any question. The more frankly the mistake is admitted, the better. In doing so, it is always wise to offer a brief explanation of how the mistake came to be made, and to couple this with the assurance that steps have been taken to prevent its recurrence in the future. The customer will have other orders to place in the future, and these must not be lost sight of or imperiled for want of an explanation of the circumstances that caused the present trouble. A cheerful request that the goods forming the basis of the complaint be returned at the expense of the seller counts for much with the customer, and ought invariably to be made in such a case of settlement.

2. *Where a Third Party Is the Cause of the Complaint.*—When this is ascertained to be the fact, the full details should be pointed out to the customer, if for no

We have completed a test of several other motors from the same stock as that from which yours was shipped to you, and we find to our consternation and regret that a good many of them are not as noiseless as they should be. We understood perfectly at the time of filling your order that you required a noiseless motor, and accordingly we shall consider it a favor if you will return to us at our expense the one you now have.

We are today sending you by express, charges prepaid, a new motor which we have found, by test, to comply fully with your specifications, and we hope that it will arrive in time to spare you further inconvenience. If it should arrive too late for your purpose, please have no hesitation in returning it at our cost.

The mistake in the first instance was due to our haste in filling your order without preliminary testing. We are extremely sorry that this neglect has caused you any inconvenience, and we assure you that we have taken steps to prevent a recurrence of such neglect.

You will feel assured, we hope, that we value your orders highly, and that any you may send us in the future will be executed with the utmost care.

Example of a letter recognizing that the customer is justified in his claim.

other reason than to make it clear that the seller is not himself at fault. The loss of the shipment by the railroad or by the express company can be told briefly, as a simple fact. But the seller should invariably advise the customer that further steps ought to be taken in order to get a settlement or a delivery. Far better is the rule that the seller should always offer to deal with the offending third party himself. Many cases will arise where it is a wise policy to take the necessary steps at once and inform the customer of what has been done in his interest. This policy contributes much to good will. And, if the seller happens to be of greater importance in the business world than the customer is, action by the seller is more likely to result in a satisfactory adjustment.

3. *Where the Fault Lies with Both Seller and Customer.*—In this case the best policy is usually either to "make good" without explanation, or to explain clearly and then to offer to assume the entire responsibility. It can very rarely happen that it will prove wise to explain fully and at the same time offer to share in the loss with the customer. This is a niggardly policy that rarely satisfies, and that never makes friends. If you are in the wrong at all, assume the full consequences—and do it gracefully—and you will be the gainer in the end.

4. *Misunderstandings Regarding the Goods.*—There is, lastly, the complaint that originates in the fact that the customer misunderstands the proper way to use the goods, or is unable to use them intelligently. Such a situation is likely to make him dissatisfied, and to cause him to find fault with the goods when the fault really lies with himself.

Replies to this sort of complaint call for considerable tact on the part of the writer, since the trouble is founded on a misunderstanding, or on a lack of under-

standing. Here, once more, it is most necessary to remember that however trifling or insignificant the difficulty may appear to you, to the customer it is an important matter. In replying, therefore, his point of view must be the sole consideration, and the explanation must be made commensurate with the importance that *he* attaches to the matter. A full description of the article, technical and otherwise, worded as clearly as possible, is no more than his due in exchange for his money. Furthermore, he should be asked to write again if he finds that he needs further enlightenment, and he should be assured that you are really trying to satisfy him and to make things clear. This, after all, is mere justice, and whether or not it is an annoyingly trifling or troublesome matter to you should have nothing to do with the manner in which you reply to him.

3. WHEN SETTLEMENT OF THE CLAIM IS REFUSED

Cases of this class ought to be extremely rare, for the customer is either justified in his claim, or, as we have seen above under (1), it is usually policy to treat his claim as a valid one. If, however, the seller is convinced that the customer is entirely wrong, that he has no justification whatever for his claim, and if he is, moreover, determined not to grant it, it is vital that the refusal be made in the right tone and with the right mental attitude.

The problem is, of course, how to refuse the customer's request and yet to retain him as a satisfied customer. To reply in cold terms that he is wrong, that his claim is unjust and that it cannot therefore be granted, is the surest way to alienate his good will and to drive him elsewhere with his future business.

Cases such as these call for the exercise of diplomacy. There may be special circumstances that may contribute assistance in giving a personal tinge to the letter. The matter can sometimes be treated as a difference between friends, and a refusal to grant the claim can sometimes be softened by invoking the relation of friendship. We are concerned with business relations solely. In the latter cases, it is usually well to admit that from the customer's present point of view he is probably justified in taking the position that he does. The effort must be made to show him, however, that he has reasoned wrongly, or has not realized the full effect of his attitude. The justice of the seller's point of view must be tactfully urged, and ought to be convincing in its nature, even though it is not made prominent as an argument.

It is one thing, however, to convince a man through his reason, and quite another thing to *satisfy* him that he is wrong. Thus explanation must be expressed with tact and, perhaps, accompanied by an appeal to his "sporting instincts," that will serve to show him that he *ought not* to claim what he does.

Let us suppose the case of a man whose leg has been amputated, and for whom an artificial limb has been specially made under specific directions from the surgeon. On delivery, it may have proved highly uncomfortable and awkward to use, and the buyer has written, let us suppose, refusing to accept it or pay for it. A suggestion for the tone of the proper reply will be found given on the following page.

Finally, there are certain maxims that it is well to have always in mind when replying to letters of complaint.

1. Never take a stand or make an assertion that is

Anyone unfortunate enough to have lost a limb is certainly entitled to the very best appliance, the most convenient substitute, that will help to replace it and to minimize the great loss he has suffered. And we thoroughly and sympathetically understand your position that the artificial limb sent you is uncomfortable and seems to be too long for you, and that it is, therefore, unsuitable to your needs.

Let us assure you, however, that at each stage of its designing and manufacture, we have consulted with Dr. _____, and that he is authority for the statement that the disappointment that you now feel is inevitable when you first begin to use the limb. Our experts, under Dr. _____'s direction, have planned for the future, rather than for the immediate present.

You have the assurance of a house whose reputation for skill is unquestioned, that when you have adapted yourself to its use, the limb furnished you will be suitable in every respect.

It is no doubt true that its present use is attended with discomfort. Wouldn't it be wise, however, to accept our assurance, in connection with that of Dr. _____, that present inconvenience will shortly give way to delighted satisfaction on your part?

This will be the case, and we say it with assurance. It would, under the circumstances, be highly unwise for us to consider a return of the limb.

We count with equal assurance on your wise acceptance of the present circumstances, for the sake of the future satisfaction that will be yours.

Example of a diplomatic refusal to recognize a claim.

untrue or that will even appear to be debatable to your customer. Never give him a chance, in other words, to argue with you—or you are lost. Any statement made regarding your position must be so true and plain that your customer has no chance to doubt its truth or even to consider it open to discussion. If it appears absolutely necessary to say something which, however true, your customer may possibly call in question, it should be prefaced by several statements which the customer cannot dispute, and which will lead up logically to the statement which you fear he may dispute.

2. Never jump illogically from one point of view to another or from one position to another. Whatever stand you take, let it be adhered to firmly, but be careful not to seek to bolster it up by a lot of disconnected arguments. The whole idea of your letter is that it must carry your customer with you as you proceed. You cannot do this if the continuity of his thought is broken up by irregular and illogical sequence of yours.

3. Let the letter be physically easy to read, i.e., see that it is logically broken up into paragraphs. A letter that is not paragraphed lacks the clearness and sense of progression that come from a well-paragraphed letter and is at best confusing as well as tiring to the attention. If you are not conversant with the art of paragraphing—for it is an art—the companion book in this series on *Better Business English* should be consulted. Remember that a letter that is difficult to read is likely to irritate—and to cause irritation in the mind of your customer is fatal to a pleasant settlement of the dispute or complaint.

4. Be courteous, no matter what the circumstances. To show irritation or impatience is not only to incur the risk of losing the customer, but puts the writer who

is guilty of this weakness at a disadvantage with his customer. The customer's interests must be given the preference over everything, so far as one's own feelings are concerned, and the way to do this best is to let one's letters convey the impression of the "smile that won't come off."

5. Before proceeding to dictate a reply to a complaint, imagine your customer as seated before you at your desk. How would you *talk* to him? Get yourself in the frame of mind to be as courteous as you would try to be if he were present. It will not be difficult then to inject the right tone into your letter. As the late Elbert Hubbard said: "Write as you feel—but be sure that you feel right."

A tale should be judicious, clear, succinct,
The language plain, and incidents well linked.
Tell not as new what everybody knows,
And, new or old, still hasten to a close.

—*Cowper.*

CHAPTER VII

HINTS ON SALESMANSHIP AS APPLIED TO LETTERS

Dr. Frank Crane, who, by the way, disclaims any pretension to being a salesman, once gave what he called the "Ten Commandments of Salesmanship." They are so thoroughly applicable to salesmanship as applied to letters that they are well worth adopting as a business creed by the man who tries to sell by mail. They are:

1. Be agreeable.
2. Know your business.
3. Tell the truth.
4. Don't argue—suggest.
5. Make your proposition plain.
6. Remember names and faces.
7. Never forget your social—and moral—obligations.
8. Don't be egotistic—concede that privilege to your customer.
9. *Think* success.
10. Be human.

The principles involved in several of these "commandments" are discussed in their proper relation to the subject of sales letters in the preceding chapters. They are, of course, principles inherent in all business letter-writing, and Dr. Crane enunciated nothing new in his "Ten Commandments." It is worth while to

comment on each one, however, since they constitute a convenient summary of the principles applicable to every class of business letter.

1. *Be Agreeable*.—The master key of human nature lies in the disposition of all of us to associate with and to deal with, to be open-handed with and to assist, those who know how to "get on our right side," who "treat us right," who radiate good nature and good will. Specifically applied to letter-writing, this means not only that one's first approach, the business proposal, should be couched in pleasant, agreeable language, but that in any dispute or difference of opinion *you* are the one to do more, to go farther in conceding a point, in offering to adjust a claim or to take back an unsatisfactory article, than even strict business honesty demands. It *pays* well, in the end, to be agreeable under all conditions, even to the extent of smilingly taking the worst of it.

2. *Know Your Business*.—The writer of a letter cannot make the desired impression, the attempted sale, the permanently loyal customer, unless he knows his subject through and through. To hope to achieve by accident or by luck what must be done at in a scientific way, and with thorough preparation, is not the part of a salesman, whether he be a traveling man or an office man. This subject is discussed at length in the chapter on "The Atmosphere of Business Letters."

3. *Tell the Truth*.—Looked at merely as a "gambling proposition," this pays better, is more certain of permanently good results, than lying, than misrepresentation, than subterfuge, than stating half-truths. To lie successfully, one must, it is said, have a good memory. To tell the truth requires no fortification of the memory, no elaborate preparation. It is, on the other

hand, incomparably more certain to win a customer, to bind him to you by ties of faith and trust, than all the dissembling and pretenses and subterfuges that a brilliant brain can conceive. This subject is also discussed at some length in Chapter I.

4. *Don't Argue*.—The old adage, “A man convineed against his will is a man uneconvineed still,” serves to prove the wisdom of this injunction. Argument may serve to convinee for the moment the man who is not ready with a “come back,” but it often fails to “stick,” and it is not the sort of conviction that will make him willingly hand over his money. *Suggestion*, that leads the other man’s mind to your point of view, is far more likely to end in his taking the step you want him to take. A story, an adage, an illustration, even in a letter, serves to suggest a point, and should be allowed to carry the suggestion without argument. The reader will see the point. Mere argument may convinee him as he reads; but he is likely to “come loose” later on.

5. *Make it Plain*.—It is not words, words, words, that convince or make an impression, but simple clearness. To make your point plain it is necessary to take the other man’s point of view. What is clear to you may mean nothing to him. If you can write from his standpoint you have a chance, and the only real chance, to win him. The importance of this is shown in Chapter II.

6. *Remember Names*.—If, on meeting a man whom you have seen but once before in your life, you are able to greet him by his name, you have opened the way to his heart. So, in a letter, even though it be addressed to a firm or a corporation, if you head it for the attention of Mr. So-and-So, it carries an atmosphere of intimacy and of personal contact that begins to make itself

felt as soon as one begins to read it, that is not to be attained by the mere impersonal address to the firm. We all have our little vanities, and it is not wise to ignore the advantage to be gained from gratifying harmless peculiarities of this sort. For letter-writing, this commandment might be extended by adding: Visualize your prospect while writing.

7. *Don't Lose Sight of Your Moral Obligations.*—So far as letter-writing is concerned, this injunction is much of the same nature as: "Tell the truth." The business man who is "out for the stuff," merely, is sure to arouse suspicions regarding his good faith. Unscrupulousness in motive crops out in the tone of one's letters. And he who has a finely developed sense of moral obligation will win the confidence of his prospects where the unscrupulous man will fail.

8. *Don't Be Egotistical.*—Egotism in a letter can be as destructive to one's chances as it is in conversation. As is pointed out in the earlier chapters, your customer is the one to be humored. Your opinions don't count for much with him; but his opinions should count for everything with you. Concede him the right to his point of view—humor him. It pays.

9. *Think Success.*—The tone of your letters is the result of your mental attitude at the time you write them. If you haven't the tone of a winner, you can't expect your correspondent to persuade himself. A letter is likely to be an abstract sort of thing, anyway, and you have to project your thoughts through it to your correspondent. Your thoughts must be of the right quality, therefore, before your letter can make the right impression.

10. *Be Human.*—This is a terse way of expressing the adage that "one touch of nature makes the whole

You are probably familiar with our Letter Opening Machine, a device that sells itself to most Office Managers, as soon as it is shown to them.

We have no representative for this in your City and we should be glad to have you undertake the agency.

We are enclosing an illustrated circular which will show you the different classes and sizes in which the machine is made and the use to which it can be put.

It is selling in very large numbers just now and we desire to push it. It sells for \$10-16 according to model desired, which is very cheap, don't you think?

It is attractive to all offices where the mail is heavy. It opens the letters as you will note by paring a thin edge off but without damaging the contents of the letters. It is a very attractive proposition for agents to handle. It does the work much faster than it can be done by hand, and thus is a great labor saver; it is therefore something that soon pays for itself.

We can offer you very attractive discounts ranging as high as 50 plus 10% on orders of 12 or more. If you are looking for a chance to make easy money--here it is!

If you will let us know whether the proposition interests you we will be very glad to take up with you the question of discounts and of an exclusive territory. If you are unable to undertake this yourself will you suggest the name of the right party for us to approach?

In this connection will you inform us how many of the enclosed circulars bearing your name and imprint you could use to good advantage?

Hoping to hear from you by return mail, we are
Yours very truly,

An instance of a sales letter, inherently weak and lacking in salesmanship, but rendered more ineffective still by the "scattering" of its argument, and the utter lack of logical sequence.

You are probably familiar with our Letter Opening Machine, a device that sells itself to most office managers as soon as it is shown to them. It is attractive to all offices where the mail is heavy. As you will note, it opens the letters by paring off a thin edge, but without damaging the contents [of the letter]. It does the work much faster than it can be done by hand, and thus is a great labor saver. It is, therefore, something that soon pays for itself.

We are enclosing an illustrated circular which will show you the different classes and sizes in which the machine is made, and the use [s] to which it can be put. It is a very attractive proposition for agents to handle. It sells for \$10 to \$16, according to [the] model desired--which is very cheap, don't you think?

It is selling in very large numbers, just now, and we desire to push it. We have no representative for this in your city, and we should be glad to have you undertake the agency. If you are looking for a chance to make easy money, here it is. We can offer you very attractive discounts, ranging as high as 50% plus 10% on orders of twelve or more.

If you will let us know whether the proposition interests you, we will shall be very glad to take up with you the question of discounts and of an exclusive territory. In this connection, will you inform us how many of the enclosed circulars bearing your name and imprint you could use to good advantage?

If you are unable to undertake this yourself, will you suggest the name of the right party for us to approach?

Yours very truly,

The same letter as that on the opposite page made much more effective by being rearranged. Note that now such sales ideas as are advanced are at least presented in logical sequence. It is still far from being a good sales letter, but serves to illustrate the principle that even poor material may be made more forceful if properly presented.

world kin." You must avoid formality in letters; eliminate the stilted, fossilized phrases; make your letters the expression of yourself, and not the remote, cold-blooded affairs that most business letters are. If you are trying to sell golf balls, for instance, some little intimate reference to the golf course, to the game itself, to the idiosyncrasies of caddies, or to the perversities of balls, gives a human touch to what might otherwise be an impersonal proposition. It is human warmth that helps to thaw the atmosphere between strangers.

Another opportunity to "be human" is offered you whenever you receive an inquiry for something you cannot furnish. Never reply with the mere statement, however pleasantly put, that you "are sorry that you have nothing to offer of the kind (or style) inquired for," but proceed to give, openly and frankly, the name of a reliable firm that can. It pays well to give all the time and effort necessary to make every letter a *builder of good will*. And if you cannot have the profit involved in actually making a sale, the good will you gain by frankly putting the customer in touch with one who can furnish the goods, is cumulative for the future, in building up a prestige that is invaluable.

These "commandments" might well have a few more added to them, which are more specifically applicable to the sales letter. These are:

11. *Don't Scatter.*—An argument, a presentation of a proposition, a description of an article, is seriously weakened in its effect if the development of the subject is not logical. The mind can follow a logical presentation of a subject without exertion; if the development is confused or does not lead step by step to the logical climax, the effect of the letter itself is destroyed.

or weakened. To "scatter" in sales talk is as wasteful of effect as the undue scattering of troops is in the operations of an army.

12. *Give the Whole Story.*—Except where a series of sales letters is planned in which the subject is gradually unfolded in sequence, all the points of the article offered, all it will accomplish in the way of advantage to the prospect, all it is useful for, in short, all there is to be said from the point of view of the customer, should be said plainly, and no point should be slurred over. You never know which point will appeal most strongly to a customer and hence you cannot afford not to give him a full presentation of your case.

13. *Avoid Alternative Choices or Offers.*—A variety of "combination" offers, where, for example, half a dozen articles are offered, and the "combination" offers involve a special price for Nos. 1, 2, and 3, for Nos. 2, 4, and 6, and Nos. 1, 3, and 5, runs afoul of the psychological law that decision must not be embarrassed by the necessity for discrimination between conflicting offers. It is impossible to press the prospect to act unless the decision is made easy for him. He cannot be as forcibly urged to act "now" if the final choice is left to himself, as he can if the proposition is clean-cut and involves no choice, but calls for a decision on a single act. It is true that this rule is frequently broken—and there may be circumstances to justify such action. There is no doubt, however, that it is a safe and wise rule to follow, in sales letters as well as in personal sales talks.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

We have insisted throughout this book that a business letter should be written in the same tone in which a business conversation is carried on—that the writer of a business letter must be human, and must express *himself*, avoiding all formalities of expression. To the student of principles, this may at first thought appear difficult to carry into practice.

It must, of course, be understood that a letter is necessarily more condensed than oral business communications. Yet it should be equally easy to understand that one's business letters can well be made to convey the same *tone*, even if they do not embody the same amount of talk—of words—that would be used if the communication were spoken instead of written.

It is admittedly difficult for some people to write as well as they can talk. Many successful salesmen would quickly lose their standing as such if they were forced to effect sales by correspondence alone. For while they can talk effectively, they cannot write with any semblance of effectiveness. In most cases this is due to lack of training and of practice. They have not learned to think slowly enough to express *themselves* in writing. But letters *can* be made to become real sales talks—and this sort of letter is being written more and more generally, in place of the stiff and formal communications which

were once regarded as the only proper form of business communication. The secret lies in the fact that the writer of a sales talk has learned to think as simply and as naturally for his written words as he would for his uttered words. He has learned to discard all self-consciousness, and to address himself simply and naturally to his subject and to his correspondent, and, in addition, to *concentrate* his expressions and his language to fit the necessities of a letter.

This is what is meant by the advice so frequently given in the foregoing pages, that, in order to be thoroughly effective, business letters must be business talks. And this is what you must aim for and *train yourself to do*, if you would be effective in your own work.

If you have read through this book studiously and carefully, you have possibly concluded that by this time you know all you need to know about business letter-writing. Perhaps this will be true—in theory.

But between knowing the theory of a thing and actually putting it into practice there is a gulf that can be crossed only by hard work and much thought. A business man, for example, usually has the theory of accounting well enough in his grasp to enable him to discuss the work with his bookkeeper and to consider balance sheets with intelligent understanding. But he could scarcely take charge of the books, and still less could he keep the books himself. He lacks the ability to *do* the thing that he knows all about in theory. He has had no practice in the actual doing of the work. This is as true in outside interests as it is in business. The golf player learns the theory of the stance, of the grip, of the approach, of the swing—and is startled to find that when he comes to put the theories of the game into

practice he is a joke to the caddy and a source of mortification to himself. He is horrified—and humiliated—to find how utterly incompetent he can be in a game whose principles he thought he had learned perfectly. He discovers the wide difference between having the theory and putting that theory into practice.

So it will be with you when you first try to carry into practice the principles discussed in this book. When you first sit down to dictate, after finishing the reading of this book, you will probably find yourself unconsciously beginning your letters with the old phrases: "We beg to acknowledge your favor," or "We beg to call your attention to," etc. They will seem to insist on coming to your tongue, in spite of your knowledge that something original ought to be dictated in their place. The old habits are not easy to overcome, even when you know that they are bad habits.

Letter-writing is truly an art. Even to approach the mastery of an art means much hard work and equally much thought. The man who can instinctively dictate masterly and successful sales letters, and do so without careful thought, is truly a master of the art. But for your consolation and encouragement it can be truthfully said that such "masters" are extremely rare. The large majority of those who are regarded as skilled sales letter-writers are continually learning, continually thinking, continually trying to improve their methods and to make today's letters better, more effective, more human, than were those of yesterday.

Your first attempts then, to write model sales letters cannot be expected to produce masterpieces. You will probably flounder a good deal, and produce letters which, when you later read them in typewritten form, will clearly not be what you had hoped to make them.

The chances are that you can improve on them then and there, before signing them. Do so! That is the way—the only effective way—to become able to write. Do your best while you are dictating—and then, when you read them through later, do not hesitate to improve on what you thought was your best, and make them better still.

If you follow such a method, it will not be long before you find yourself applying, with ever-increasing facility, the principles laid down in this book. You will be interested and delighted to find that *practice* will, before long, enable you to write letters every bit as good as the examples shown in this book. But you must be honest with yourself, and insist on making yourself produce the best there is in you. You must be equally frank, too, in refusing to send out as a signed letter anything that you are capable of improving on. What your stenographer may think of such re-writing is nothing—what your correspondent will think and do when he reads your sales talk is everything!



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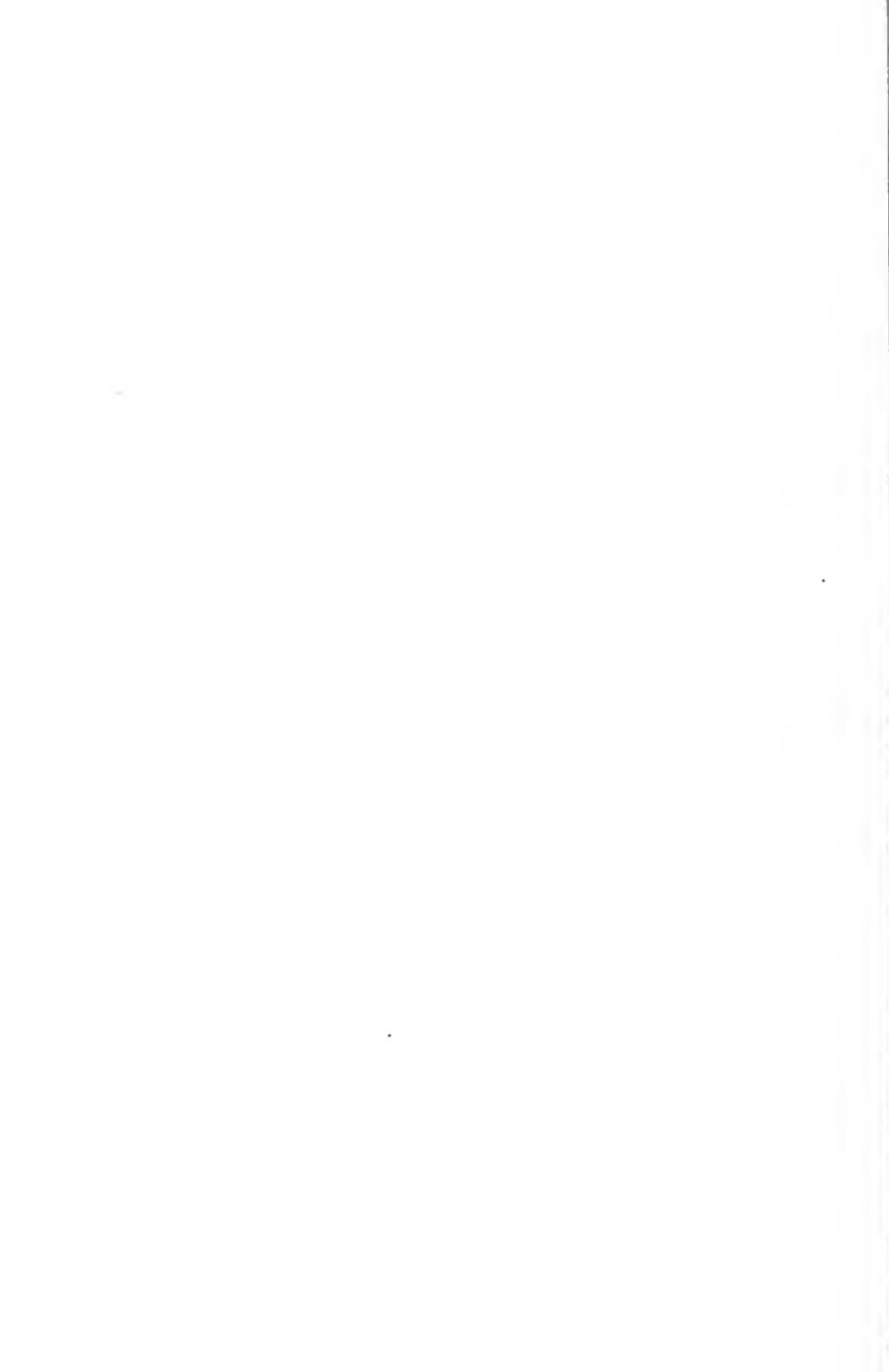
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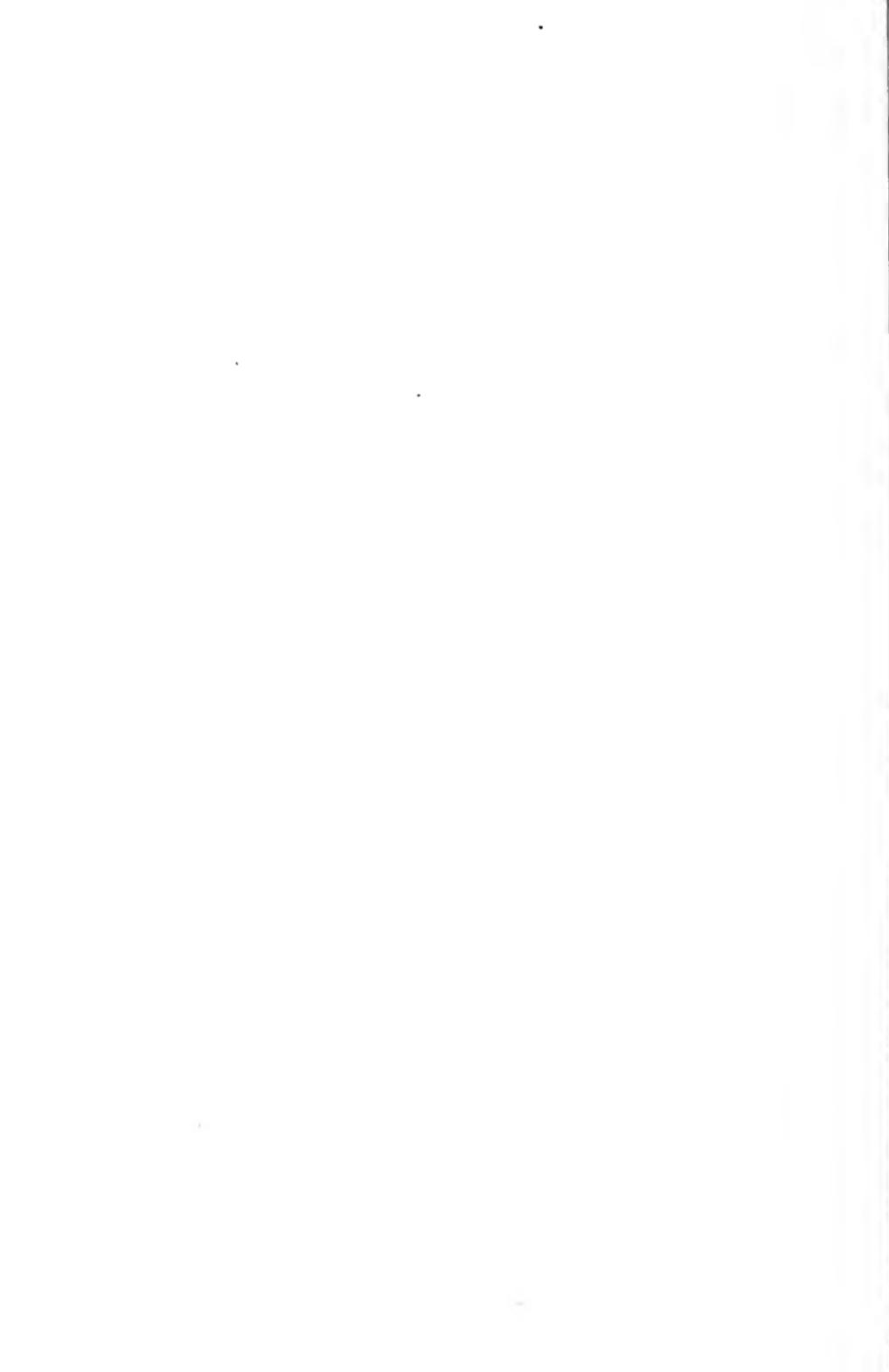
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